

**one for the money, two for the show, i never was ready so i
watch you go by stardustupinlights**

Category: Percy Jackson and the Olympians & Related Fandoms - All Media Types, Percy Jackson and the Olympians - Rick Riordan, The Heroes of Olympus - Rick Riordan, The Trials of Apollo - Rick Riordan

Genre: Angst, Annabeth Chase Bashing (Percy Jackson), Annabeth Chase/Percy Jackson Break Up, Awkward Sexual Situations, Bottom Percy Jackson, Daddy Kink, Demisexual Percy Jackson, Developing Relationship, Don't read, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, F/M, Hurt Percy, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Percy Jackson is Easy, Pre-Relationship, Road Trips, Sad and Beautiful, Sexual Coercion, Soul-Searching, Unhealthy Relationships, all bad tags are, and if you can't see what's wrong with it then... get help, demi percy isn't feeling it with annabeth, i don't actually bash her, i hate her character but i know exactly why she is the way she is, if you're a fan of hers, please, thank you, that can't take a realistic approach, that last one is percabeth the other two are perpollo, this fic just paints her in a very bad light, this is also about percabeth, to how a person like her with unresolved trauma would conduct a relationship, unenthusiastic consent

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Summary:

In which Annabeth proposes, in a way, and Percy goes down memory lane, only to realize their relationship is not what he wants (or needs) in his life, hasn't been for a long time... and he's never been what Annabeth wanted anyways.

After taking a split-second decision to get on a bus to New York from Berkeley, leaving Annabeth planted at the restaurant and all his belongings but for his phone behind, he runs into Apollo. Then, their bus explodes. Cue an unexpected, soul-searching road trip, because a certain sun-god decided Percy needs therapy, and the sun chariot is, despite what others might think, not a free ride.

Relationships: Apollo/Percy Jackson, Past Annabeth Chase/Percy Jackson
- Relationship

Comments: 518

Kudos: 2054

Collections: Aro's Favorite Works, Ashes' Library, Fics that I treasure cherish value and appreciate - absolute masterpieces, The Best Fics I Have Had The Pleasure of Reading, The Temple of Apollo Fic Collection, Why sleep? We have great stories!, all i need is just a pen/i know i was born for this, best fics to ever exist, fics to die for, fuck you for making me feel things, percyj, perpollo fics that keep me up at night, the best fics I've read on ao3

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

PLEASE READ THE TAGS. IF YOU FIND ANY OF THEM MAKE YOU UNCOMFORTABLE, REFRAIN FROM READING AND/OR COMMENTING.

seriously, bro. take care of urself.

anyways, hello. i don't know why im doing this either other than i listened to some songs, and went "huh. percabeth would do this" and here we are! yes, this is perpollo, thought i don't think it'll be that explicit. also, if you read my other fics: not to worry, both of them have half their next chapter done. writing has been slow these days, unfortunately, so writing this was a bit of a breath of fresh air.

please, enjoy this pain! and in case you wanna listen to some music while you're at it, here's a playlist i made:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1niYDtnXiZBUlZt2XAccsf?si=f080c0de6fbb4d15>

Percy first became uneasy on the second anniversary of Luke's death—which is the second anniversary of the Titan War, and also his birthday. He would admit to himself that he's been uneasy ever since Aphrodite told him his love life would be *interesting*, but that would imply a level of self-awareness and an amount of backtracking that he's not equipped to deal with at all.

It's a wonder he hadn't noticed anything on the first anniversary, but when thinking about it, it makes sense: Gaea woke only seventeen days before then, and everyone was still high off the victory, more concerned about establishing peace between Camp Jupiter and Camp Half-Blood than anything else. There wasn't time to do much more than a quiet vigil, then everything was back in action again.

The second anniversary, though. That had been a bad birthday. A strong red flag that he willingly ignored. It went down in New Rome, since he'd already finished moving for college that April. He had plans to meet with Annabeth after class and work, since they weren't living together yet, and found her teary-eyed, hair undone, her dorm a mess, her roommate missing.

"What happened?" He'd asked her, immediately looking around the room to see whether someone else had been there—the lamp was on the floor, her closet was open and clothes were strewn over her bed with noticeable frustration, her new laptop abandoned under her bed with the charger still plugged. All things Annabeth never did. "Did you and your roommate fight, or—"

"No," Annabeth shook her head, smiled at him, forced, embarrassed. "No, I just remembered what today is and I guess it made me a little... mad."

Percy was ready to agree, to nod, to suggest cancelling plans because he didn't really want to go out to a restaurant anyways, he would've been fine with pizza and a movie, but Annabeth insisted. Then he heard the rest of her words.

"I guess losing Luke's dagger in Tartarus affected me more than I thought," Annabeth giggled, and Percy just stared, speechless. She rolled her eyes. "I know I'm not sentimental that often, Seaweed Brain, and Daedalus' laptop was better, but I do have feelings, you know?"

"That dagger," and this is when the uneasiness set in, along with the realization. "Right. It was Luke's—how did you get it back, by the way? I never asked."

Annabeth's expression fell into careful confusion, neutrality; the face she makes when she thinks Percy's doing the opposite of what she wants him to do. He saw enough of it in Tartarus. "Why do you ask?"

Because he kind of stabbed himself with it and I don't remember anyone pulling it out, he doesn't say. He couldn't have, not while looking at her in the eye; her eyes were already turning accusing, the longer he prolonged the silence, so he just shook his head, sighed.

“Sorry—I’m a little tired. Maybe we could settle for pizza?”

“What? And lose that reservation?” Annabeth shook her head, rolled her eyes. “I had to call like two months in advance. No chance, Seaweed Brain. Give me twenty minutes.”

Percy picked at his cufflinks—a gift from Paul, from back when he graduated high school—then nodded, trying to dispel the image of Luke’s broken body and Annabeth’s tears from his mind. *It’s fine*, he told himself, *how can she not be upset? He was a brother to her.*

But he was more, too, a voice in his brain provided, but Percy did as he was accustomed to: he grabbed it by neck, and buried it deep, deep down, where he could never reasonably find it again.

Annabeth looked amazing that night, and Percy made sure to say so. He made sure to say the food was great, even though in reality it was okay, because he’s not used to fancy meals that he doesn’t know half the ingredients of because they’re all imported from somewhere else that he’ll probably never be able to afford a visit to. He shared his dessert with Annabeth and averted his eyes when she flashed the card her dad gave her for expenses when the bill came to the table.

He did all the things a good boyfriend does, the things Annabeth’s taught him to do for her. It includes inviting her back to his dorm, even though he doesn’t feel like doing anything other than sleeping, but he’s used to ignoring that type of details, by that point.

“You’ve been quiet today,” Annabeth pointed out afterwards, from the bathroom, coming out of the shower. She put on her clothes, directly, without hesitation, still looking at him. “I didn’t freak you out earlier, did I? I just had a moment. Nothing to be worried about.”

“I’m just tired,” Percy lied, yawned to sell the picture, and she smiled at him, swallowing that pill with not a drop of doubt, and also not a drop of genuine trust. *If she doesn’t say it*, he thought, *then who am I to bring it up?* “Are you visiting Boston again next week?”

“Yep,” Annabeth sat on the edge of his bed to put on her shoes. He wished she would hurry up, and felt bad about it. “Wanna come with?”

“Nope,” Percy closed his eyes. It’s easier to ignore red flags that way. “No, I’m good here.”

“If it’s about the money—”

Percy made a sound of protest, waved it away, despite a flash of annoyance making him frown. “No, it’s good—I have shit to do with the swim team. I’ve been slacking off.”

“Idiot,” Annabeth laughed, moved in closer and kissed his cheek, a little peck that should’ve felt sweeter than it did, instead of awkward. “Happy birthday, Seaweed Brain. See you tomorrow.”

Despite all of this, Percy didn’t start feeling cautious until he moved in with Annabeth. The uneasiness was something he got used to, something he learned not to be aware of whenever she looked at him with eyes that implied he should invite her back to his dorm again, whenever she complained about him not having more time for her even though she was the one double-majoring and not working a part-time job to be able to afford the fancy dinners she likes so much.

Mom warned him, repeatedly, that living with a significant other is extremely different from living with a family member, but no amount of her advice could’ve prepared him to have to do a tour around their apartment every morning and every night, to pick up the empty mugs of coffee and glasses of water and half-finished books Annabeth left *everywhere* with no intention of ever picking them up because she *wasn’t done with them*.

Percy’s messy. He knows he’s messy; he got tired of hearing about it from Annabeth, who once saw the state of his room when they were kids and how much dust Cabin Three gathered during the school year and decided that must be his lifestyle, even though, as he got older, Percy started making an effort to clean up for himself a little better—at the very least, he doesn’t throw his clothes on the floor on purpose anymore. He aims for the laundry basket now.

Still, it doesn't stop at mugs, glasses and books. Annabeth doesn't know how to properly dust anything that isn't a bookshelf, her cooking—without any help—is the worst thing Percy's ever had willingly, and she was helpless against the washing machine they bought, and at buying groceries. He realized very quickly that dividing chores would be awful, and growing up at camp where you only really have to worry about your cabin looking *presentable* and not smelling is probably not a good way to teach kids boring adult tasks.

Percy becomes a housewife—househusband? And, they're not married, but he feels the term applies—which he is fine with, really. Doing mindless tasks like these allow him to wind down after a long day, and reminds him of how he'd do it with mom sometimes. He likes cooking. Cleaning is a good way of venting when he's feeling frustrated. Laundry smells nice and feels warm and cozy. Annabeth can do the dishes and get the groceries without tragedy.

However, the other stereotypical part about being a househusband—that is in college and in a swimming team and has a part-time job—is one he's not ready for. And yes, he means the part in which he is the arm candy. The trophy husband. Annabeth shows him off to her friends at UC Berkeley as often as she can and when they're gathered with other demigods, Percy's reluctant social skills make it so that she does half the talking for him, which sometimes is good, and sometimes frustrates him to the point that, when they get home, he finds something to clean, and texts about half their friends they hung up with to make sure they're not going to spread Annabeth's idealized stories about him.

But he also means the sex. Long gone were the days of having to invite Annabeth back to his dorm, because living together and alone means she can just initiate and really, it isn't so bad at first. He's happy they're finally living together after a whole semester of having to share spaces with strangers. It feels nice not to sleep by himself, to wake up from nightmare and being able to center himself with the rhythm of Annabeth's heartbeat against his ear because, yes, he's the little spoon.

There was one night where it went sour, though. Percy was back from a swimming competition that their school won—he has no idea how New

Rome got away with registering their university in the mortal system, but it sure is there, and they sure participate in events—and he’s pretty happy that his hard work training the team with the coach paid off. He kind of just wanted a nap, though. Any adrenaline from their victory worn off in their bus back to New Rome, a car ride of about five hours, and he was ready to crash.

Annabeth had different ideas. “We have to celebrate.”

She dressed up—or down, but Percy kept his eyes firmly on her face, feeling like an asshole. “Annabeth, honestly, I don’t think I can even get it up right now—”

“Just take a shower,” she suggested, looking at him from underneath her eyelashes, caressing his arm. Her perfume was soft and sweet, not at all like her, which is how he knows she tried to make this good for him, because Percy hates the perfumes she likes; they’re all as strong as her attitude, and sharp, designed to make all eyes fall on her when she enters a room. “And you’ll be fine.”

“I took a shower at the hotel before we left,” Percy sighed, and Annabeth’s expression started falling into palpable disappointment. “I’m sorry. Look, maybe tomorrow—?”

“No, I get it,” Annabeth cut in, her tone growing cold. Percy unconsciously braced himself. “I was—this was a bad idea. You don’t like this sort of stuff, either. I should’ve known. You always do this when I try to make it nice for you—”

“Wait, wait, what?” Percy waved his hands at her, watching her put on her bathrobe and undo her hair, confused. “What do you mean? All the other times, we’ve—”

“Do you think I don’t notice how tense you are all the time?” Annabeth wrinkled her nose. “Don’t get me wrong, Percy, you’re really good at what you do, but it’s so... cold. There’s no passion. Like, I’ve researched so much about how to get guys off, and we’ve practiced so much that I know I’m not doing anything wrong, so I thought maybe we could try something

different. Clearly this isn't it either, so I went out and bought this for no reason—"

Gods. He was so confused. "Annabeth, I mean, sex is just not a big deal for me, so—"

"You're a weird guy, Percy," Annabeth frowned, rolling her eyes. "Even for this. Whatever, I'm gonna take this off and go to bed. Good night."

Yeah, sex got awkward after that. He doesn't want to think about it anymore.

A month or so before Annabeth graduates from one of her majors—she was always going to finish before him, he realized at some point, well after cramming so hard to graduate high school so they could go to college together—the subject of what they'll do after they're done with college comes up. Or, more like Percy brings it up.

"Don't you want to go back to New York?" He dared ask, while cooking their lunch for the next day so they wouldn't starve between classes. He wore an apron and was nursing a nasty burn he got during breakfast, when Annabeth had unexpectedly pressed him up against the counter for a kiss. She'd been trigger happy ever since her finals for the major she's ending started. "I miss it a lot."

His back was turned, so he never got to see Annabeth's initial reaction, but her tone didn't inspire any confidence. "What for? Berkeley is nice, and I already have some companies lined up to go to interviews."

Percy paused. "And you didn't think to tell me about that?"

"I assumed we'd be staying even after you graduated," Annabeth said, and he finally turned. She shrugged at him. "New Rome is probably gonna offer you a job anyways, you know? It doesn't seem like a chance worth missing. And this apartment is nice."

"I miss my hometown," Percy frowned, and Annabeth's expression shifted into something close to exasperation, but otherwise skeptical. "And even if

they offer me a job, what if I don't want to work here anyways? I miss mom, and Paul, and Estelle. I'm missing her early years."

"You aren't missing that much," Annabeth waved it away, her lips twitching in a way that reminded Percy of how she talks about her own little siblings, the twins, and even the ones at Cabin Six: like they're inconsequential and unimportant for her life, a footnote. Unworthy of much thought. "People only start getting interesting around puberty—"

"For you, maybe," Percy let out, and Annabeth's resulting scowl felt a little too good to be the cause of. He doesn't often talk back to her. He doesn't like it; she always reacts as if he's hurting her, and maybe in her mind, he is. He can never be sure. "I—I can't live my life here, Annabeth."

"Funny, because moving all the way out here was *your* idea first, remember?" She shot back, and that one—that one hurt. That one made Percy regret a lot of things he didn't know he regretted until that second: never taking a sabbatical so he didn't have to cram high school, moving in with her so soon, not travelling back to New York for Christmas or New Years and instead spending the holidays with Mr. Chase to help Annabeth make the visits more bearable for herself. "And it turned out great, Seaweed Brain. This is great. It's the best idea you've ever had—and, you know, if you got tired of New Rome, San Francisco is an option, though I would rather move to Boston because it'll be easier to avoid dad—"

"I don't think that'll work," Percy shook his head, turned back to the stove. The food was burning, but not nearly as badly as his eyes were. At least the meal was salvageable. This situation? Not so much. He'd rather be back in Tartarus. "I don't—I want to go back to New York. That's final."

"Percy, I don't think—" Annabeth started, then stopped herself with a sigh. "Whatever. You'll come around when you realize I'm right, anyways. Moving across the country is expensive, Percy. We couldn't afford an apartment this nice in New York."

He never said anything. Annabeth went on and on about the disadvantages of living in New York, from how it would affect her line of work to how inconvenient it would be to sell everything they've bought for this

apartment. And she added, between those comments, remarks about how this is what he wanted anyways—when he was seventeen and miraculously alive and seeing a life at the end of the tunnel for the first time in a long time.

This exchange taught Percy about uncertainty. He ignored that, as well. By that point, he'd become a professional at it. Your issues can't catch up to you if you pretend like they aren't there, right? He should know better. He knows better. He knows what unhappiness towards a partner looks like from his mom and Gabe, but there's that thought again: Percy's unable to look at himself before looking at others. He always tries to fix Annabeth's unhappiness before considering his own.

"Percy?" His name snaps him back to reality, and he blinks, refocusing his gaze on Annabeth. Slowly, the room and the situation start processing again, reminding him of why he went down such an awful memory lane. "Percy, your food is going to get cold."

"I—" Percy starts, chokes, wondering why the fuck she's telling him about the *food*, when she just pulled out a ring box from her bag and nudged it at him, open, a silver band sitting in it along with a gorgeous diamond ring that make his eyes hurt just from looking at it. As if she didn't just *ask*. "Can you—can you repeat the question?"

"Oh," Annabeth glances at the rings, raising her eyebrows. She looks impeccable in a tight, red dress, her hair done up, her make-up perfect. Her lipstick is red, red enough it has already stained her wine glass. They're at another expensive restaurant, and not for the first time Percy wonders what her father think of the bills he's paying. He wonders if he thinks that's fair in exchange for a drop of Annabeth's love and consideration. "I asked if you've thought about marrying me yet. I think it's about time, Percy—we've been together for, what, six years or so? And, since you're moving to New York and I'll be in Boston, I thought it would be good to get engaged, you know, as some sort of consolation for now, since we'll be apart for a while."

"The rings," Percy clears his throat. He's sweating. He feels like he just woke up from a nightmare only to realize he's living it. "Why the rings?"

“I got them custom made—well, mine is custom. I know you don’t like expensive stuff—”

“Doesn’t answer my question,” Percy swallows, and watches Annabeth tilt her head, lost. He doesn’t wanna know how much her ring cost. “Why would you buy our rings?”

“I wanted it to be a surprise,” she explains, seemingly confused. Then, her expression clears. “Ah, don’t tell me you already bought—?”

“Nope!” Percy interrupts, clears his throat again, takes a swig of his wine because, gods, what the fuck is happening? “Are you asking me to marry you, Annabeth?”

She blinks. “I was getting tired of you not acknowledging the obvious.”

“The obvious,” Percy repeats, and Annabeth’s mouth twitches; she is starting to realize his shock isn’t exactly out of happiness. “What is the obvious?”

“That we’ll get married someday?” Annabeth asks, frowning even deeper at him, looking at him the way she does when she thinks he’s being purposely dense. “We don’t have to do it right away, Percy, it wouldn’t work while living in different cities, but I just thought I’d have things planned out. I picked out a venue and made a guest list—”

“You did *what*?” Percy snaps. He doesn’t mean to, but he’s losing it, and Annabeth rears back, surprised—then her eyes narrow in annoyance, anger. Familiar territory, really. “Why—Annabeth, I know it’s like, a thing, that weddings are a bride’s party, but we aren’t even engaged. Does anyone else know about this?”

“No,” Annabeth rolls her eyes, sipping on her wine. She looks at the rings. “Of course not, Percy, we have to break the news together. Why are you so altered? Surely you expected this, Seaweed Brain, you aren’t this dumb—”

“Oh my gods,” Percy lets out, burying his face in his hands. “I told you to stop using that nickname, Annabeth, please, we’re not twelve or sixteen

anymore—”

“It’s hard to break the habit!” She snaps at him, leaning on the table. Heads are starting to turn in their general direction, but Percy couldn’t give less of a shit about that. “What is wrong with you?”

“With *me*? Does it not occur to you how insane this is?” Percy gestures at the rings, and without him meaning to, the wine bottle splashes some of its content upwards. Annabeth’s eyes widen, and she shoots Percy and incredulous look. “Listen, that wasn’t on purpose—”

“You’re *still* struggling with this?” Annabeth demands, shaking her head in disappointment. “Did you learn nothing from Tartarus?”

Oh, right. He forgot to go over that particular trauma while freaking out in his head, as soon as he saw the rings. “That is *not* fair—”

“Neither is how you could make the hearts of everyone in this room stop!” Annabeth snaps back, and Percy flinches. Her face starts to flush, her eyes shining. Gods, not the fucking tears. Not right now. “Percy, you know how scary it is—”

“Can we not do this right now? Please? Focus on the matter at hand?” Percy points at the rings again, and Annabeth tears up even more. “Annabeth, you need to understand—”

“Percy, will you marry me?” She asks, killing his voice. They stare at each other, as the seconds prolong into minutes, and he gives no answer. He leans back against his chair, not breaking eye contact as his jaw clenches. Annabeth is the first to snap. “You have to be fucking kidding me right now—Percy, do you *want* to marry me?”

Percy thinks about uneasiness, caution, and uncertainty. He thinks about Luke’s dagger, forever lost in Tartarus, about nights pretending to be asleep so that he wouldn’t have to deal with her wanting to make things physical, about feeling uncomfortable, and unhappy, and like he’s always just been second best. A consolation prize. Something to show off to friends, something to brag about, something to keep in a leash and in control

because if he goes through his life without someone hand-holding him, surely, he'll just end up destroying himself and everyone around him.

He looks her in the eye and shakes his head. "No."

He'd like to say he feels regret, at the way Annabeth's expression shatters into hurt and disbelief. Instead, Percy stands, turns, and hurries out of the restaurant. He walks, then he runs, then he somehow gets himself into a taxi, and then a bus station. He buys a ticket to New York and before he knows it he's two hours into the trip, and he's been clutching his phone in his hands, since it hasn't stopped ringing with Annabeth's number.

Holy shit. He's free.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

alright so listen up here's for my sugar boo maia. the real MVP. the monster addiction demon. bb if you're reading this PLEASE stop oh my god if you die i die and that is not cool i have to finish my fics. anyways ur a wonderful showstopping brilliant gorgeous person and your addiction to making playlists is the best worst thing that's ever happened to me because now i listen to something other than taylor swift and halsey. it's amazing. it's great. wouldn't change that ass for a hundred bucks because it's worth a million already. that being said, i would punch you for a billion dollars and if you don't do the same to me i will sue you. get that money. i love you. you're ridiculous. this is the gayest thing i've ever done but it's worth it for u, homie. happy fucking 20th birthday and my god do i hope u reach 22 exclusively to make taylor swift jokes.

anyways. for the rest of u reading this. no comment. just take this chapter and keep screaming in the comments because i'm absolutely loving this. i'm working on my other fic, DON'T WORRY. it's just slow because i'm so close to the end and i wanna make it good. don't panic. i got 11 pages ready for u and more in progress for next chapter. do no underestimate me. i'm giving u nothing if not perfect content.

so, enjoy!

The bus makes a stop at a gas station, somewhere along the side of a highway. Percy has no idea where they are. He just knows it's been quite a few hours because of the time in his ticket compared to the time displayed on his phone. He stumbles into the bathroom, still feeling a little high on adrenaline, and something like relief—he didn't realize how close he'd been to a panic attack in the restaurant until he had one in the bus.

He shoves his phone in his pocket, ignoring the non-stop messages, the calls. His hand brushes against his wallet and Riptide, and Percy can't help but be glad he ignored Annabeth's insistence that he leave the pen behind,

because she didn't want their date interrupted. He turns the sink's handle, splashes water on his face, and then looks at his reflection in the mirror.

He's pale, which isn't a surprise. He just about had different types of heart attacks in the last few hours. There's shadows under his eyes because sleeping has been difficult these last few days—*months*, his mind supplies, but Percy doesn't want to do any more introspection right now—and his lips are still stained red from the kiss Annabeth planted on him earlier that night. As if in a trance, Percy wipes the lipstick off with water, and then leans against the sink counter, trying to think straight.

Dread starts to settle in, as he realizes he just left his girlfriend planted in a fancy restaurant with a ring box. The same girlfriend that would've probably expected him to unzip her dress later that night, without excuses, the diamond ring glistening in her finger, mocking him, reminding him of how tightly leashed she has him. Something acid rises up his throat and Percy gags, breath laboring again; he bends, dunks his head under the tap until water is running down his head to his neck and under his shirt, until he's shivering and trying to keep down what little wine he drank during dinner.

"Nah, honey, trip's going fine, I'll call you back in an hour—" A voice says, walking into the bathroom, and Percy squints at the door just enough to see the raised eyebrows of the guy that came in, before retreating with an expression that screams *yeah I'm not dealing with that loser*.

Fuck, he's a mess. Straightening up, Percy rubs his eyes and shakes his hair to get rid of some of the water. Then, he untucks his dress shirt, and undoes his tie, shoving it inside his pocket and popping open the first few buttons of his shirt.

His phone starts ringing again, and for a second it fills Percy with rage unlike anything else before, unlike when he wanted to choke Akhlys, unlike when he wanted to tear Gaea apart or kill Luke with his bare hands. However, that's all it is: a blind second of self-indulgent rage, and then he takes a deep breath, calms down, allows the feeling to wash over until he can't hear his heartbeat in his ears anymore.

He pulls his phone out and sighs, watching how flooded it is with notifications. He ignores all of them, goes to the Contacts app, and unmarks Annabeth's number from his speed dial, and from his favorites. Then, he goes into her contact details and blocks her, setting her to always go straight to voicemail. Finally, he deletes her number, though he knows it by heart, so it will only really keep him from getting hounded any further. It's unlikely he'll ever forget how deep she sunk her teeth in his skin.

Percy stares at his home screen background: a picture of Estelle taken during last Christmas, six years old and already getting tall, a big happy smile on her face, in a glittery skirt and a bejeweled shirt that he has no doubt hurt mom and Paul's eyes all night. Annabeth had been so jealous, when Percy made that his background; the picture before it had been a selfie she took of them during their fourth anniversary, and Percy had always secretly hated it because he could see, underneath his smile, the wear their relationship had on him, even back then.

Tears fill his eyes as he realizes he has no idea what to do now. He knows where to go; even in a daze, he was able to buy a ticket to New York. But what, after that? His only consolation is that the moving truck for his stuff left last week, so mom already has most of his things and he didn't really leave anything other than clothes and some essentials behind in New Rome. He doesn't have to worry about that part. He already got a part-time job in the city, as well, thanks to Hazel and Frank pulling some strings for him, but what...

What does he do about Annabeth? About seven years of each other being the only thing that mattered? He's poured just about everything into their relationship and now he feels like a strong wind could knock him out, worn too thin, pulled too tight. Are they broken up? Percy feels like the answer is yes but Annabeth's frantic calls say otherwise, says that he has to be upfront and properly tell her he's leaving her but it's just—

Gods, why did he let it go this far? This wrong? He thought it'd be okay. He thought he was happy. He thought the awkwardness was normal, that the uncomfortable feeling in his chest every time she touched him was just his claustrophobia acting up, that his annoyance was just the typical long-term result of being around someone a little too often.

He saw the red flags. He ignored them. He—gods, he *knew*, he knew when Annabeth told Luke that she never loved him it was a lie, that she did it to spare him, to spare herself, but he never thought he'd resent him even after death, that he'd still hang over the both of them. If Luke had been buried instead of burned, he has no doubt that Annabeth would've chosen to spend her day sitting on his grave instead of celebrating his birthday at the millionth fancy restaurant in the city, with his awkward table manners and his unsightly tension, screaming that he doesn't belong there.

He needs time. This isn't—this isn't fun. This isn't something he's ever thought about; if Annabeth had never gotten those rings, if she hadn't so shamelessly disregarded the fact that he's supposed to have a clear choice in something as complicated as *marriage*, he'd probably still be at that restaurant. He'd still be dying inside, slowly, paper cuts on top of paper cuts, wondering what's wrong with him that he can't enjoy the things she does for him instead of realizing that Annabeth's *never* done things for him. No, everything she does is for her first, for him second. Saving each other's lives doesn't count. That's different. Anyone they know would do it.

Gods, he feels sick. He didn't have a bite of his food. He just blew around three-hundred bucks on a bus ticket and while he has his savings, the idea of having to eat gas station food isn't exactly appealing to his already upturned stomach. He doesn't have a change of clothes. This is—fuck. Fuck. Okay. He needs a plan.

Get a granola bar from the store. Maybe several. Maybe a bottle of water or two, for the road. Use the bathroom. Make sure there aren't monsters around. Get someone to let him borrow a travel pillow, maybe? If not, he can just use his suit jacket. Get on the bus. Rinse and repeat at the next stop. Hope that Annabeth won't report him as missing to the police or anything extreme like that.

That's—something. He can adjust as things come up. He can roll with the punches. It's okay. This trip should only be a couple days long.

With this in mind, Percy steps out of the bathroom, and lets out a relieved sigh at seeing his bus still waiting, at seeing people mingle around. Passengers stare at him as he makes his way to the store, but Percy doesn't

pay them any mind. If they're going to New York, chances are they've seen weirder stuff.

He's doing a run-down of the shop, basket with his granola bars and water bottles in hand, seeing if maybe there's something else he might need—he grabs a travel kit with a toothbrush and toothpaste, Barbie-themed, and a packaged brownie because he's weak—when a very familiar-looking red sports-car pulls up to the gas station, and a blond guy, tall, with wide shoulders, a nice tan, and a perfect jaw, steps out.

Percy ducks behind a shelf and crouches around, ignoring the attendant's stare. Once he's confident in his hiding spot, Percy shoots said attendant a look, and brings his finger up to his lips in a *shhh* gesture. The dude blinks at him, and shrugs. He's probably used to weirder shit as well.

Back to panicking, though—this is just his luck. Of course this would happen to him, today, out of all days. From his spot, he just about manages to see through the window how Apollo refills what he assumes to be the sun chariot's gas, whistling, judging by the shape of his lips. The seconds past, adding up to minutes, then he finishes, pays with his phone, heads back towards the front of his car—

Walks right past it to come into the store. Shit. Percy ducks even lower, and the attendant snorts. Well, that guy is not getting a tip now—not that he's carrying more than ten bucks in cash, honestly.

The doorbell chimes and the attendant launches himself into the usual welcome. Apollo grins at him, sunny as ever, taking off his sunglasses—it's nighttime, what the fuck—and winks. “Hey, there. Got any of the good bubblegum?”

“Er,” the attendant looks at his selection of bubblegum. “I don't know which one is the good one, sir.”

“Hm,” Apollo leans over the counter to look at them closely, and then his expression clears into a disarming smile. The attendant blushes, clearing his throat. “Those will do, pal. You got any ice cream?”

Fuck. Percy standing next to the ice cream freezer, and the attendant raises his eyebrows, glancing at Percy over Apollo's shoulder. "Uh, right behind you, sir."

Holy shit, can't this guy cut him some slack? Percy starts to hurry down the aisle before Apollo can turn, but he miscalculates and hits a magazine stand, letting out a curse loud enough that he *knows* he's screwed. He turns towards Apollo, rubbing the spot where he hit his head.

Apollo stares, smile gone. Percy stares back. They don't say anything for long enough that the attendant shifts and clears his throat, so Percy gives up, stands, and gestures towards the ice cream freezer.

"What flavor?" He deadpans, and Apollo and the attendant both snort. Percy glares at them both. "Fucking rude, guys."

"Percy," Apollo lets out, sounding pleasantly surprised. Then, he looks him up and down, and goes from lightly amused to concerned. "Uh, are you... alright?"

He resists the urge to blurt out that no, he isn't, he's actually doing *fantastic*, with all the sarcasm he can muster up, but he figures that'd be unfair, since Apollo hasn't done anything to piss him off yet. Instead, he shrugs. "I'm just... around. What are you doing here?"

"Just finished up work," Apollo gestures at his car, and Percy nods in understanding. Right. The sun set. "Gotta let it cool off, and it's not like I'm in a hurry to go back... *up there*, you know."

"Right," Percy presses his lips together, and cautiously moves towards the counter, leaving his basket on top of it for the attendant to check him in. Apollo stares, shamelessly, at what he's shopping for, looking even more concerned, and Percy can't even blame him. "Well—what a coincidence, huh?"

"Are you... on a quest?" Apollo asks, sounding unsure, because he knows Percy hasn't gone on a quest in *years*. In many, many years. Still, it sounds

like a good enough excuse, so Percy nods. Apollo raises his eyebrows. “And what does this entail?”

“Uh, road trip,” Percy shrugs. “The usual stuff. Gotta recover... a thing. For... my dad. Yeah.”

“A thing, for your dad,” Apollo repeats, nodding slowly. He glances over his body again. “In a suit?”

Fuck. He forgot about the suit. “Yep. Weird shit, man.”

The attendant interrupts Apollo with his total before he can call bull on Percy, and, trying not to blush, Percy pulls out his wallet, then thinks better of it and decides to pay with his phone. This was a mistake, because he didn’t properly clean up his screen full of notifications and there are several texts on screen from Annabeth’s number still, without its name, but very obvious to who they might be from. His eye catch on a few, as he stumbles through the motion of remembering his password.

Where the hell are you, Percy?

Have you lost your mind?

You can’t just vanish like this.

This is really childish. Come back to our place. We need to talk about this.

Percy. You can’t break up with me over this.

Yeah. Very incriminating, and the fact the he never got a privacy screen for his phone, and that he’s standing next to a god who would probably be able to see through one anyways, doesn’t really do much to help the situation. Apollo awkwardly clears his throat, no doubt having gotten his fill, as Percy pays. The attendant doesn’t look that amused anymore, and Percy almost apologizes for it.

“Well, see you ‘round,” Percy mumbles, looking at Apollo, and then—well, he bolts. He doesn’t *run*, he wouldn’t call it that, but he most definitely

walks faster than normal and makes a beeline for the bus, ignoring Apollo calling his name.

He doesn't want accusations. He knows what this looks like: he went MIA on Annabeth and now he's ignoring his responsibility to own up to it and figure things out. He doesn't want to be asked why he's doing this to such a dream girl, because that's what everyone seems to think Annabeth is for him, since they haven't seen her when she's truly angry, when she's truly hurtful, when she screams and points her finger at him, when she calls him a coward.

He feels himself tearing up again as he goes inside the bus and falls on his seat, his hands shaking when he pulls his phone out of his pocket and looks at the amount of incoming voicemails, hunching in on himself for some privacy, even though there's no one in the bus with him. He's—scared. He looks over the texts, first, reads each and every single one; Annabeth hasn't reached the point of calling him a dumb fuck yet, but she's already started threatening to call his mom, and, gods.

His mom. He can't—Annabeth can't get to his mom first. If she doesn't report him as missing his mom probably will, and beyond that, she'll get worried sick about his whereabouts. So, taking a deep breath, Percy dials his mom's phone number.

She answers on the first ring. "Percy, thank the gods, are you alright? Annabeth has been texting me, what happened? What's going on? Are you okay—?"

"Mom," he says, his voice shaking. He can't do this. He can't. He can't tell her everything—how he messed up. The things he realized. The things he let Annabeth do to him, from the inside out. It's too much. "Mom, I—I'm okay, alright? I'm on a bus to New York. I should be there in a couple days. It's just... some things happened, but I promise I'm okay—"

"Percy, what happened?" She asks again, and he shivers, feeling nauseous again. "Baby, you don't sound so good. Why are you coming early to New York? Annabeth's saying some weird things, and I don't understand—"

“We had a fight. Don’t listen to her,” Percy lets out, which is the closest to the truth that he can get. “I’ll explain everything when I get there, mom, I just—I need some time alone. Don’t worry. I’ll be fine.”

“Percy, honey—” She tries, but he’s already taking the phone away from his ear and hanging up on her. He stares at his phone afterwards, still feeling sick, and doesn’t even jump when someone—Apollo—sits on the seat next to his own. He just blocks his phone and leans back against his seat, closing his eyes.

“So,” Apollo says, his voice soft. “A quest, huh?”

Percy snorts, bitter. “Among other things. Are you staying to watch the show?”

“I’m here to make sure you’re doing alright,” Apollo says, then pauses, giving Percy time to answer to that, but he doesn’t have a response. Apollo sighs. “Listen, I don’t want to butt in—”

“Funny, you’re kinda butting in—”

“Percy,” Apollo cuts in, his voice still kind. Their shoulders brush because this bus isn’t that big, so their seats are close together, and he can feel the warmth of him, coming off his body, making him shiver. Even with the jacket on, he feels cold. “I know we aren’t the best of friends, but I don’t think offering a listening ear is beyond the scope of our relationship.”

“You help me with my homework, like, once a month,” Percy wrinkles his nose, squinting his eyes open to catch a glimpse of him; Apollo just seems a little amused, a little concerned, and not at all pitiful. He closes his eyes again and sighs. “...and I really appreciate that help, by the way. But this is—I’m fine. I’m good. I’ll be fine.”

“You don’t *look it*, Percy,” Apollo points out, nudging his shoulder softly with his own. “Hey, I’m being nice. Haven’t even made up a haiku yet, though it’s never late to start—”

Percy snaps his eyes open, shaking his head at him. “Don’t you dare, *please*, or I might actually lose it tonight again.”

“Again, hm?” Apollo catches on to the word like a fish on bait, and Percy groans, burying his face in his hands. “Just saying, those texts I saw—a little concerning. Do you often allow her to speak to you like that?”

“What do you know?” Percy whines, curling even deeper into himself, bringing his legs up to his chest and taking off his dress shoes. Ugh, he hates those things. He stretches his toes. “What do you even think is going on?”

He tries not to sound too pitiful with that last question, too insecure, too unsure, too scared, but he feels like he failed. Apollo hums, drumming his fingers against the single armrest between them. “Honestly, sounds like she cheated on you—”

Percy chokes. “*What—*”

“—which I suppose isn’t the case, considering that reaction,” Apollo leans back and looks up at the ceiling, thinking. “It was a nasty fight, though, wasn’t it?”

Percy tries to glare at him, but he doesn’t quite manage to. He’s so tired. “Yeah. I mean—more like an argument, to be honest. It was kinda one-sided, too. She just... she overstepped. Hard.”

Apollo presses his lips together. “Not to bash her, or speak of things that I don’t know about, but she seems like she often oversteps without realizing it. I remember how she used to invite herself over to my after-class tutoring sessions at New Rome University when you started going, only to try to argue with some of my points—”

“Yeah,” Percy winces. “That was... I’m still sorry about that. It wasn’t cool.”

“It wasn’t you who made the offense, so quit apologizing,” Apollo shrugs, opens his mouth and then closes it, frowning. In the end, he finds his words.

“Percy... those messages weren’t okay. No one should be speaking to their partner like that. And those were just a few of many, I imagine. And I noticed your deleted her number... may I ask, just this once, what happened?”

He feels like if he speaks it out loud it will make everything too real, too much at once. He’s so tired. But Apollo looks at him and doesn’t seem to be demanding the information, doesn’t seem like he’ll just get mad and leave him if he refuses to, if he can’t, and just that small piece of knowledge... just that bit of kindness makes him weak.

“She bought engagement rings,” Percy starts, and Apollo’s eyebrows shoot up to his forehead. He even lets out a sound of surprise, and it seems he’s suspecting what comes next, because his expression then narrows into an uncomfortable frown. “I didn’t—I don’t know when she bought them. Hers was a custom made diamond ring. Then she asked me when I was planning to propose, and told me she’d already... picked out a venue, and started a guest list, and I just...”

“Gods,” Apollo says, letting out a deep breath. He looks horrified, and Percy can’t tell whether he likes that or not. “Holy shit, that—this is gonna sound bad, but I’d almost rather she had cheated on you. What the fuck?”

Despite pain squeezing his chest, Percy snorts. “Would’ve been easier to deal with, honestly. It’s just... it was...”

“She put you on the spot,” Apollo puts it into words, and Percy swallows, nodding. “She basically... demanded that you marry her, in a way.”

“She said it was obvious that we would because we’ve been together for six years,” Percy feels his mouth going dry, and clears his throat as Apollo winces. “I kind of—well, I freaked out, and she got mad about it so I just... left. She asked me if I would marry her, if I wanted to and I...”

Apollo lets the unfinished sentence linger, for just long enough that Percy’s allowed to soak in his pain again, for a moment. In the hurt of thinking that you’re with the right person, at the right time, only to one day realize that

every little piece of yourself that you've given to them was undeserved, twisted, shattered. Wasted.

Percy lets Apollo say it in his place. "You realized you didn't want to, didn't you?"

"Yes," Percy blinks, suddenly aware of his blurry eyes; Apollo pulls a handkerchief out of his pocket, soft, with a pattern of little caricature suns with sunglasses on smiling at him. He's almost sad to have to wipe his eyes and nose with it. "Thanks. I... don't know what to do now. We were going to live apart anyways, in completely different cities. Maybe we would've ended up breaking up within a year, but she... why would she do this?"

"To keep you," Apollo puts it plainly, so much so that Percy flinches. Apollo grimaces. "Sorry—it's just, that's what it looks like. Annabeth... don't get me wrong, Percy, I'm not saying she's necessarily a bad person, but she seems to be quite possessive when it comes to the people she loves. You most of all. And I know what possessiveness looks like, mind you, I can be quite nasty. But Annabeth seems to strangle you with it."

"I've noticed," Percy shrugs, closing his eyes as he realizes for just how long that has been true. How good it feels to say it. How much it hurts. "She always made sure everyone in a ten-miles radius knew who I was dating. That I was taken. Gods, this is another level, though."

"Quite," Apollo agrees. "I can't imagine that you deleting her number means that you're willing to go back to that, right?"

Percy frowns. "No. I—that's the one thing I got clear. I don't want any of this anymore, I just... I'm so tired. But I don't think she'll let me just end it like this and, Apollo, I'm fucking terrified. I'm not good at this. I... I'm not a *toy*, I'm not her prize, and I'm not... I'm not *Luke's replacement* and I don't know how to make her see that. I don't."

Apollo sets a hand on his shoulder, warm and heavy as a rock, yet squeezing so softly he's almost convinced it's just his imagination. But it isn't. "She'll only see it when she lets herself do so, Percy. That's not on you. If you truly don't want to be with her again, if you're not in love

anymore, then all you have left to do is to put your foot down. Set boundaries. Don't let her steamroll you or gaslight you into anything else."

"It sounds so easy, but it isn't," Percy murmurs, and opens his eyes when he hears and feels people getting into the bus. Seems like their stop is over. "Fuck, you should probably get off—"

"It's fine," Apollo says, waving away the idea before it can even take shape. Percy ignores the relief that fills his chest at that, and meeting his eyes, he can see that Apollo caught it for him anyways. He offers Percy a smile. "Surely you won't mind a travelling companion?"

Percy manages a hesitant grin. "The chariot?"

"Eh, those horses know their way back," Apollo shrugs. "Besides, what could go wro—?"

As soon as the driver turns the ignition, the engine explodes. Everyone lets out terrified sounds, since it's not a small explosion; the bus rattles with it and the hood flies off, luckily falling in front of the bus instead of on top of it. Smoke quickly starts to rise up, and the driver turns towards everyone and screams. "Everyone out!"

She doesn't have to say it twice, but Percy's seat is at the back of the bus and there are no back or side doors, so everyone dog piles around the only exit with their luggage; Percy is reminded of a very similar situation when he was twelve, but dispels those thoughts when Apollo's hand on his shoulder squeezes again, getting his attention.

"Ah, Percy," he's grimacing, shooting him an awkward smile that very quickly turns into a frown. "Seems like your mother-in-law found out about your... disagreement."

Oh. Well. "I'm gonna die, aren't I?"

"Nope!" Apollo shakes his head, looking horrified at the idea. "Put on your shoes, though, and grab your grocery bag—that's perfect. Close your eyes. Count to ten. This is gonna be just a little pull—"

Apollo flashes them out of the bus and this is how Percy discovers Apollo's a fucking liar, because it's *not* a little pull and, in fact, when he comes to, he finds himself immediately doubling over with nausea. Luckily, Apollo is right there to steady him, setting a hand against his forehead as he wraps his other arm around his waist from behind, to keep him from falling.

Percy looks up just in time to see the driver making it out of the bus last, and then the engine finally finishes exploding in a fiery spark of light, setting the bus on fire. Percy notices, dazed, that the ground is distinctly dry. Leave it to Athena to make sure the whole gas station doesn't blow up.

"Wow," Apollo says, still holding him close to his chest, his hands surprisingly cool. "She's mad."

Percy nods, blinking slowly. "You feel really nice, dude."

He passes out.

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

sheananigans shall comence... now.

Percy wakes up to the smell of ash and the sound of a car radio softly playing power ballads. He's disoriented for only a few seconds, blinking up at the roof of Apollo's sport car, processing that he's sitting in his passenger seat, which is slightly tilted back to allow for him to rest without having to be sat up. Then reality crashes and he groans, closing his eyes back up and wishing he never woke up in the first place.

"There, there, sleeping beauty," Apollo says, sitting behind the wheel. Percy cracks his eyes open and turns his head to look at him, sunglasses resting on top of his hair, chewing bubblegum that he can smell from down here, drumming his fingers in time with the power ballads. "Take it slow. It's been a while since such a handsome man has passed out in my arms, but the conditions were less than ideal, so I'd rather you don't scare me like that again. How are you feeling?"

Percy thinks about it for a second. "Like shit."

Apollo nods and hums in understanding, then reaches out, bending over Percy's body to retrieve his grocery bag from the floor, taking out one of his water bottles and offering it to him. He takes it with a grateful nod and almost chokes as he refuses to sit up to drink it, some of it spilling down his chin, but honestly, he doesn't give a fuck anymore.

"What happened to the bus?" Percy asks, once he's done, trying to stay calm. That explosion had not been... well, nice. And yes, there are nice explosions and bad explosions. No, he's not going to explain the difference. "And the passengers?"

"The firefighters got here and gave me a show," Apollo sighs dreamily, and Percy snorts, despite this definitely not being the time for jokes. Still, Apollo winks at him out of the corner of his eye, and he finds it easier than

earlier to give out a little grin. “Everyone’s okay. I might have magically emptied the gas tank to make sure the bus didn’t explode again, which might look a little weird to the mortals, but nothing a little Mist won’t fix for them. Lots of people have called taxis and left, others went with the ambulance, and the rest are here waiting for another Greyhound to take them to New York.”

Percy frowns. “Really? Do you think the company will actually continue the trip?”

“Nope,” Apollo shakes his head, shrugging. “The driver looked shaken. First time something like this happened in her career, apparently. That bus model was brand new, as well, so this is the sort of accident companies like to make sure won’t repeat to, you know, avoid being sued. They’ll be inspecting every single bus for at least a month, no doubt.”

“Fuck. That sucks,” Percy stares up at the ceiling, feeling guilt crawl up his chest. “And it’s my fault.”

“*Your* fault?” Apollo asks, snapping his head towards him in disbelief. “I’m sorry, Percy, do you happen to be a goddess of being petty about the wrong things? Did you manually go into the engine when no one was looking and sabotaged the thing?”

The raw shock of Apollo’s tone makes Percy blush. “Uh, no...”

“Smart boy,” Apollo snorts, shaking his head. “This isn’t your fault, Percy. Athena had no business doing that. I made it very clear to her—”

“You—you talked to her?” Percy sputters, and Apollo winces like he didn’t mean to let that out. Oh, no, he’s not letting this slide. “She was here?”

“Maybe. Can’t confirm or deny,” Apollo grimaces as Percy squints at him in suspicion, and he sighs, throwing up his hands. “Okay, alright, I called her over, we had a discussion, and your dad was here too—”

“Poseidon was here?” Percy’s voice breaks, rising up in pitch, and Apollo nods, pouting his lips. “What—why?”

“To start a war because of her attempt on your life, of course,” Apollo shrugs, throwing the information out there like he’s talking about Sunday dinner, and Percy just... stares. Mouth open. Apollo reaches out and nudges his jaw closed with his fingers, looking a little awkward. “Thankfully, I was able to control the situation. Not that I forgive Athena for this, of course, and neither does your father, but, ah, well...”

Apollo drifts off and reaches into his pocket, pulling out Percy’s phone. Percy stares. “What?”

“I might have—and you’ll have to forgive me for this, really—used your, uh, voicemail and texts messages as evidence of the rather big misunderstanding that Athena had going on in her head,” Apollo frowns down at his phone, shaking his head, and then throws a sheepish look at Percy, who’s too shocked to respond. “I’m sorry. I know you value your privacy, but I wouldn’t have done it if I didn’t feel your life was actually at stake—or, if your father wasn’t five seconds away from jumping Athena and tearing the mortal world apart if it was necessary to avenge you.”

“I...” Percy starts, drifts off, and shakes his head to see if straight thoughts might return to his mind. He has a feeling that they won’t anyways. He’s always been bad at being straight and it was one of the things Annabeth was on his ass for, because it meant she saw every guy, girl and human he hung with as a potential threat to her claim on him. Hm. These kinda realizations are getting easier to process. “I... thanks? I guess? What... what did Athena think happened?”

“Apparently, you proposed and then walked out on your girlfriend. Or she proposed and you walked out. I don’t know, she seemed... confused. She seems to have not gotten the details, or perhaps she reacted this way before she got all of them,” Apollo shrugs, looking a little disgusted. Percy can’t deny that his stomach is churning. Annabeth wouldn’t have lied to her, right? Unless... well, he doesn’t know if Annabeth considers that whole dinner as her proposing and him walking out, but either way, he said no. Loud and clear. She’s supposed to respect that, at least, right? “Again, I’m sorry I had to look through your phone, but I realized a few things while I was at it.”

“What things?” Percy asks, because the last thing he needs is more crazy news. “Nothing bad, right?”

Apollo makes an expression that isn’t really encouraging. “Well, the location in your phone was turned on, and I noticed you have an app for, uh, finding your device in case it gets lost? Yeah, I checked it and noticed that you and Annabeth have linked phones, so...”

“Oh,” Percy lets out, feeling his shoulders drop. Then, dread comes back full force. His voice comes out weak. “She knows where I am.”

“Not anymore,” Apollo reassures him, unlocking his phone—somehow, he knows his password; he can only guess he caught it when he saw Percy put it in. Maybe he should change it to something other than ‘Poseidon’s Trunks’ now—and going into the app, showing him the screen. “I changed your GPS location to make it seem like everything went well with the bus ride, like there was just a little delay. Then, I walked the route not to New York, but rather to Florida, and marked the bus station in Miami in your Maps app before I turned it off entirely and locked her out of your account. She must be really confused.”

Percy shakes his head. “She’s not dumb, Apollo. She’ll know I’m going to New York. It’s the only place that makes sense for me. She knows me too well to think I’m going anywhere else. She’ll probably be in Manhattan before I get there.”

Apollo shrugs. “It might buy you time. When you don’t arrive in New York tomorrow afternoon, she might get antsy and go check out Florida. It’s better than her keeping track of you through your phone like some creepy stalker.”

“I guess,” Percy nods, but he’s having a hard time feeling optimistic. He feels himself tearing up again and watches Apollo instantly reach into the glove compartment to pull out of a box of tissues, all sun-themed. He sighs as he takes one. “Don’t get me wrong, I... thank you, honestly, dude, I don’t know what my state would be right now without your help, but it’s just...”

“I know,” Apollo reassures him, and only hesitates for a second before settling a hand on his shoulder and squeezing. Percy relaxes under the touch, making him grin. “It’s okay. I’m not asking you to be fine with this. No one is. Athena seemed, well... shocked to learn the truth. And shocked about the way Annabeth addressed you in those voicemails. She, uh, really has... a way with words.”

Percy grimaces. “I should probably check that out—”

“Oh, no,” Apollo frowns, his voice hardening. The look in his eyes speaks of anger, but he blinks and it’s gone, turned into something a little more casual: annoyance. “You’re not going to listen to that bullshit, my friend. She’s speaking madness, and aiming to destroy your self-esteem, and guilt trip you into going back to California. Your voicemail inbox filled up an hour ago. I did you the favor of deleting it all. I recommend getting a new phone when you arrive in New York. If you can’t, I will get you one myself—don’t pull that face, I don’t *need* money, I’m a god. Shamelessly take from the one-percent, Percy. Eat the rich.”

“Thank you,” Percy finds himself saying, his chest feeling lighter. “I—I don’t know how I’m gonna pay you back for all this, man. I owe you a thousand favors now. You could send me on a quest and I wouldn’t complain.”

“Oh, no, nothing like that,” Apollo snorts, shaking his head. “I do my own quests now, as you may know. Nope, if you want to thank me for this with anything other than words, maybe you could start by attending my college classes in New York. I’m registered with a fake identity as a professor there, but dear Leto, does it get boring without demigods around. Besides, I’d like a TA.”

“I’d make an awful TA, dude,” Percy smiles, but a part of him is already warming up to the idea. “ADHD and dyslexia, remember? I won’t be able to read your fancy handwriting and you won’t be able to understand my chicken scratches.”

“We’ll adjust,” Apollo shrugs, winking at him, and then turns back to the front of the car, turning off her engine. “Okay, Percy, you should probably

clean up in the bathroom. Sunrise is soon. I'll send myself and the chariot off to it, and at the same time get another car to drive you to New York. You alright with that?"

Percy has a feeling Apollo won't really let him say no, and he's okay with that. Waiting for the Greyhound to arrive sounds boring, in comparison to a road trip across the country with Apollo. "Can I drive for a bit? Maybe break the speed limit because you'll get me out of a ticket?"

Apollo laughs as if he expected the question and nods. "Ah, a man after my own heart. Absolutely, handsome. You got it. I'll be giving my horses a few instructions while you get ready."

That Barbie travel kit comes really in handy to get rid of the foul taste on his tongue, which he suspects has more to do with the wine he drank with no food than anything else. It even has a small, tiny little soap in it that he uses to try and get his face to look *close* to normal, though there's no getting rid of his eye bags. If anything, letting water give him energy just fades some of the purple under his eyes from lack of sleep, which he'll just have to do with.

He uses the toilet—and makes a mental note to buy some anti-bacterial before going on the road, because yikes—then airs out his jacket, which is now full of wrinkles, before throwing it over his shoulder. When he steps out, he feels a little less like he's dead on his feet, and throws a look at Apollo on his way to the store to get a few more things.

The car is not a car anymore. Instead, the sun chariot gleam, almost painfully so, hilariously out of place in this dingy gas station off the side of a highway. It's nothing in comparison to the horses, though: four tall, taller than normal, even, majestic stallions, with golden, shimmering manes and white in color. Now, *they* are painful to look at, way too shiny, and he sees them exhaling fire as Apollo brushes their manes, so that's... neat. Guess it's just in his destiny to meet almost every important horse out there, except for his own brother Pegasus. Ugh. Mythology.

Percy gets a few more granola bars and brownies and another travel kit, as well as a pair of sunglasses to protect himself from Apollo's radiance, if

only for the sake of being funny. However, the second he gets within earshot of the chariot, he hears someone speak.

“Hey, handsome,” the voice goes, deep and smooth, and he jumps, turning around. There’s a sound, familiar in its nature, because it’s a *horse laugh*, and he turns towards Apollo’s horses, eyebrows up to his forehead. The one closest to him is looking right at Percy, and as he watches, shakes his head, flapping his mane at him. “You clean up nice, pretty boy. Want a ride?”

Percy’s eyes widen and he comes closer, elbowing Apollo. “Dude, am I hallucinating?”

“What?” Apollo asks, but the horse whose hair he’s brushing snorts, speaking over him. He sounds identical to the other horse, if a little more playful.

“Oh, no, you’re seeing the real thing, my Lord,” he says, makes a sound like a chuckle. The first horse, which Percy’s still the closest to, leans forwards to sniff him, which feels like some sort of violation he usually would apply to humans. “Name’s Pyrois. My brother here is Aethon. The losers in the back are Phlegon and Eous. *A pleasure to meet you.*”

“Hey, not cool!” Says the horse behind Pyrois, Eous, huffing. “Don’t bad mouth us to the handsome fella, we deserve a chance, too!”

“You guys need to use your internal voice more often,” Phlegon hoofs forwards, trying to get a better look at Percy. “Oh, wow, pretty—want a ride, gorgeous? I can go all day. Literally. It’s my job.”

“Are you guys flirting with me?” Percy asks, bewildered and confused. Apollo audibly makes a confused sound, head snapping in his direction, but that seems unimportant right now. “I don’t think any horse has flirted with me before.”

“Their loss,” Aethon shakes his head, and nudges at Percy’s chest with his snout. He cautiously steps back, because he saw that horse breathe fire. “Aw, sorry, Lord, I know. We’re kinda hot. You must be overwhelmed.”

“I—was that a pun? Never mind, I don’t wanna know,” Percy shakes his head, and steps back a little more. The horses seem to be sad about that. “Why are you flirting with me?”

Apollo makes another sound of disbelief. “They’re flirting with you? What?”

“Well, how could we resist that ass?” Eous says, snorting. “Looks sweet from here!”

“Your horse just said my ass is sweet,” Percy notifies Apollo, who stares at his steeds in betrayal, scandalized. “What do you teach them? Do you have horse porn in your stables, or what?”

“Why are you blaming me?” Apollo whines, shaking his head. He turns towards the horses. “Bad horses! This is a friend! Poseidon’s son! Go flirt with mares, not with him!”

“He’s playing innocent, but we’re being mild in comparison to what he says about you,” Pyrois reveals, and Percy blushes, burying his face in his hands. “Apollo has a big mouth. Helios had a big mouth, too. Miss that guy. Amazing gossip. And you’re a son of Poseidon, we’ve heard of his escapades with our kind. Thought we’d give it a shot.”

“What are they saying?” Apollo asks, watching as Percy tries to process the fact that he just got flirted with by four horses because his dad is a notable horse fucker. Gods, what is his life? “Percy! Don’t listen to them! Bad horsies! I’m not giving you any more snacks, like, ever!”

“So, because your owners both had big mouths you decided to be horny?” Percy shakes his head, and Apollo gasps in horror. “Sorry, guys, I’m kinda... not into horses. And please don’t flirt with my dad because of that.”

“Oh, well, we tried,” Phlegon huffs out a bit of fire, shaking his head in disappointment. “Hey, guys, wanna kick Apollo in the nuts again?”

“Don’t,” Percy snorts, and the horses seem to exchange disappointed looks. He looks at Apollo. “You’re a bad influence.”

“Me?!” Apollo gestures at the horses. “They’re older than me!”

“What a whiny baby,” Eous comments, and Percy covers his mouth with his hand to keep down a laugh. “Let us kick him in the nuts, Lord, c’mon, he’s used to it.”

“Don’t kick him in the nuts,” Percy insists, and Apollo chokes, looking at his horses as if he’s seeing them for the first time. “Relax, guys, Apollo isn’t that bad.”

“This is so unfair,” Apollo whines again, looking at the brush he was using on the horses. He sighs. “Why am I jealous you can understand my horses and I can’t?”

“He’s just jealous because he’s too much of a chicken to flirt with you,” Aethon provides, and Percy blushes again, shaking his head. “You’re our new favorite Lord, handsome. We’re sad you don’t get to ride us.”

“Stop with the dirty puns,” Percy snorts. “Who was your favorite Lord, then?”

“Lady Rhodes,” Pyrois sighs. “What a beauty—nothing in comparison to you, though, my Lord. But your sister was indeed lovely.”

Percy turns to look at Apollo. “Your horses have a thing for Poseidon’s children.”

“Evil!” Apollo exclaims, and walks to his chariot to shove his brush... somewhere, since he hears a cabinet slamming shut. He wouldn’t be surprised if the sun chariot came with a glove compartment. “This is the last time I take them out of car mode around other people. A Maserati wouldn’t do this to me.”

Apollo grabs the reins and the horses straighten up. Percy steps back, feeling the air heating around him. “So, see you in five seconds?”

“Make it three,” Apollo shakes his head at the horses, still grumpy. “Don’t hold your breath.”

Percy does the smart thing and closes his eyes, huffing out a hot breath as he feels the chariot take off. He counts to three in his head, and feels fingers tapping his shoulder from behind. When he turns, Apollo standing there, still pouting, gesturing at a car that appeared out of nowhere. It’s not as flashy as the Maserati, and a four-seater, but still looks sleek enough to make him whistle.

“Alright,” Apollo sighs, crossing his arms. He hands Percy the car keys. “I’m ready when you’re ready, captain.”

Percy finds himself grinning, open and wide, a little sharp, that early feeling of freedom filling his chest once more. He’s starting to realize how much he needed this: the promise of a long, open road, possibilities, liberty, and good company. The sea doesn’t like to be shackled or restrained or controlled, and that’s exactly what Annabeth did to him; she kept him locked up, inside his own heart, clinging to an illusion of a perfect life, a normal life.

It’s time he breaks out of that prison. It’s been a while since he’s been this excited about something, and he catches Apollo staring at him, a bit wide-eyed. Percy wonders for how long he’s looked so miserable that his friends can’t remember what him in a good mood looks like, but discards that thought. He wants to feel good.

“Get in, loser,” Percy says, throwing Apollo a wink, and this time he raises his eyebrows, but returns the smirk. “We’re gonna have fun, right?”

“Right,” Apollo pulls Percy’s phone out of his pocket, handing it over to him, as well. “I call dibs on the radio. What’s our destination gonna be?”

“A diner,” Percy sighs. He’s starting to get hungry. “I want some greasy food. It’s been a while.”

Apollo’s smile widens. “I know just the place.”

And off they go.

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

idk how long this is gonna be, but not much.

if i prove myself wrong about that sentence later down the line.... call me out. by leaving nice comments lol.

Despite starting with high spirits, Percy realizes around two seconds into getting in the car that there's an issue. "Uh, I don't know how to drive an automatic. I'm a manual pro."

"What?" Apollo glances at him, then down at the pedals. "Oh, *right*. Well, wanna learn?"

It takes them an hour, but Percy catches on to the basics and they start on the highway. PSA: don't try this. Ever. There's nothing more terrifying than driving a brand new car onto a highway after just an hour or so of learning how to drive automatic. Still, the thrill of it kinda pumps him up. Percy knows that isn't *good*, but can he be blamed when he can't recall the last time he had any sort of fun? The last time he did something for the sake of it? The last time he didn't feel like he had to behave a certain way in order to please his companion?

So, yeah, he can drive an automatic now. Mostly. Apollo sometimes tells him to slow down or go faster because he hasn't quite gotten used to the weight of his feet on the pedal and he dreads the moment they have to pull into a parking lot, but it's alright. He has the guarantee of having someone that has been driving cars since they were invented and who could probably pull them out of an accident with magic by his side. It's cool.

Then, it's just three hours or so of driving, Apollo blasting pop songs with the windows down, and Percy's mind clearing as he thinks of nothing other than keeping his eyes on the road and enjoying himself. Conversation is minimal, mostly about what he'll be doing in New York: start med-school, pamper Estelle, work, and finally spend a holiday with mom and dad.

“Didn’t you ever try to spend the holidays all together?” Apollo asks him, his tone cautious. “I’m not saying you should all fly out, especially since *you* can’t, but...”

“Annabeth thought it’d be too much of a hassle,” Percy shrugs, holding back a sigh. “You know, it was either fly everyone to California or go on a bus, but Mr. Chase works during the holidays, too, and it’s not like I have the kinda money, to, uh, fly my parents in and out with a minor.”

“But she has enough for a diamond ring?” Apollo rolls his eyes, and Percy grimaces. Apollo sighs. “Alright, that was a bit cutting, but you have to admit there were alternatives. You could’ve gone to New York by yourself, or you could’ve spent Christmas in San Francisco and New Years in NYC.”

“She asked me to be there for her. She’s been... trying to compromise with her dad,” Percy shakes his head, biting his lip. “Guess it doesn’t matter now, though. Gods, that ring—I’m hoping she didn’t use her dad’s credit card, but Annabeth has a complicated relationship with her dad, and he can be a little scatterbrained, so he kinda just makes sure she has what she wants...”

“Gods of Olympus, that’s messy,” Apollo taps his fingers against his door, and Percy risks a glance to see his hair tousled by the wind, shining pale gold under the early morning sunlight, lips pulled into a thoughtful frown. He looks ahead again, swallowing. “Anyways, a less depressing subject: how’s your sister doing?”

It’s the best subject change ever, really. Percy doesn’t have enough words to express everything he wants to say about Estelle, but Apollo still understands, somehow, from how terrified he is of her growing up to how amazing it’s been to see her go from being so, so tiny to steadily turning into an average sized human. They pass several diners and gas stations as they go, until Apollo finally tells him to pull into one. The parking goes... eh, *decent*; it’s a blessing that the place is not packed, so they just leave the car in an empty area.

As soon as he’s out of the car, Percy abandons his jacket in the backseat and stretches, bending down to touch his toes. “Fuck, I forget how much driving

sucks.”

“I think it's fine,” Apollo supplies, and when Percy straightens up to look at him, turning, his eyes snap to his face a little too fast. He raises an eyebrow at him and Apollo blushes. “Er—sorry. Real sorry. Seriously, not cool of me, very much objectifying, did you know I’m a feminist? Equality is—”

“Dude,” Percy snorts, shaking his head. Apollo shrugs, embarrassed, and Percy lets out a playfully exasperated sigh. “Whatever, like I’m gonna cut your head off for it. I’m starving. Can we go inside?”

Apollo leads him into the diner and to a table a little too fast to be casual, after that little stunt, but Percy can only find himself being amused by it. He must admit, it feels nice, in a way. He can’t remember the last time someone just... looked at him without fearing getting their hands cut off by Annabeth, and their eyes pulled out. More than once, he’s had to apologize about her being overly rude to people that were just trying to be nice to him, if a little over-appreciative of his looks.

There was an incident with a waiter, once, and he still cringes every time he remembers it. He was just trying to be a good server, but he had been cute, short, with spiky blond hair and a good sense of humor. Charismatic. He hadn’t even made moves on him, but Annabeth hated him and treated him horribly, and Percy was so embarrassed that he left him a rather hefty tip.

“What are you ordering?” Apollo asks him, and Percy snaps back to reality, meeting his eyes from across the table. Apollo blinks at him, laying down the menu with a frown. “You okay there?”

“Yeah,” Percy looks away, clearing his throat, and grabbing the menu to look at his options. “Just bad memories. Why do you like this place so much, by the way?”

His attempt to move the conversation along isn’t smooth, but Apollo lets it slide. “Food’s better. I’m used to taking this route from Cali to Florida. I’ve tried every single other diner on the way there, and this one is the best, guaranteed. Their milkshakes are insane. And the banana split? Gods, fucks me up, Percy. Glorious. You have to order one.”

Percy snorts, a smile forming in his lips. “Isn’t it too early for ice cream?”

“Says who?” Apollo asks, throwing him a cheeky smile, but Percy’s humor dims, and he looks away again. Apollo seems to realize not only that, but the reason for it, too. “*Please* don’t tell me Annabeth was on your case about what your diet is. I’m begging you.”

“She, uh, doesn’t really like... excess?” Percy asks, unsure of how to put it. Apollo raises his eyebrows. “I dunno, man, she just... she’s used to camp food. And you know camp, it’s super healthy, and yummy. But Annabeth can’t cook for shit, so it was on me to make the food good, but she can’t handle a lot of seasoning, so I had to use all these white-people ingredients that were kinda bland, and when we went out to eat she would rather eat veggie food. Sometimes we had fast food, but she likes restaurants over them so it was like, gourmet fast food, which can really suck ass...”

He drifts off because he realizes he’s rambling, cheeks flaming, hunching his shoulders as he stares down at the menu. His eyes land on the picture of the banana split Apollo mentioned and his stomach growls, making him blush even deeper. He almost jumps out of his seat when Apollo snatches the menu from him.

Their eyes meet, and Apollo looks both outraged and excited. “Alright, fuck that, got it? I’m gonna order for you, you’re gonna have like, three milkshakes, and as many waffles as you can stomach, some good fucking sunny side up eggs, bacon, the whole thing. I would order you a burger, but I do care about being healthy a little, so maybe a cup of coffee will do instead—”

“Can it be espresso?” Percy blurts out, and Apollo’s face clears, the smile returning to his lips. Percy can’t help mirror it. “I love black coffee with espresso, and she claims to love her coffee black, too, but she pours a shit ton of sugar in it, and she *hated* it when my breath smelled like espresso if I kissed her—”

“Oh, baby, we’re getting you a pure cup of espresso if that’s what you want,” Apollo nods, and either doesn’t notice or ignores how Percy sputters

at the pet name, calling a waitress. He figures it's just a thing he does, so he lets it slide.

Apollo wasn't kidding when he said the food was good. The portions are generous, which is to be expected from any diner in the United States, really, but he's genuinely shocked at how fresh the waffles are, how rich the coffee is, and how fucking *fantastic* the mini-pancakes with chocolate and maple syrup are. His only grief is that they don't have blueberry syrup, really, but they make up for it with the milkshakes.

Gods, the milkshakes. When he first has a taste, he lets out a frankly embarrassing sound of ecstasy that makes Apollo choke, but he ignores him coughing out his eggs in favor of taking another sip. Holy fucking shit.

"Oh my gods, *Apollo*," Percy whines, tearing up. He feels silly, considering it's just food, but gods, does it feel good. Apollo chokes again. "I'm in love, I think. Who's the chef? I might have to propose. Thank you so fucking much, holy shit."

"Take a picture," Apollo suggests, coughing out the words. "Document it. Don't forget the address. You're welcome."

Percy pulls out his phone to do just that, taking a picture of the menu, as well, but when he taps out of the Camera app to go back to the home screen, he notices an app icon that sparks a flicker of doubt in his brain, and threatens to do away with his happiness.

"Apollo?" He calls, and he must be able to hear the difference in his tone, since he stops scrolling through his own phone to look up at him, straightening up, slightly alarmed. "Um, can parental control apps be exploited to spy on you?"

"What?" Apollo snaps, frowning, and gestures for him to give him his phone. He checks a few things Percy can't see, and his expression blanks, but there's a fury so strong in his eyes that Percy hunches into himself. Apollo never directs the look at him, however, taking a deep, deep breath and closing his eyes before letting it out through his nose. He blinks up at

Percy, exasperated, but calm. “Okay, yeah. This is linked to her phone, as well as to your mother’s. I’m guessing you have this for your sister?”

“It was Annabeth’s idea,” Percy recalls, swallowing. Thankfully, a sip of his milkshake does away with some of the bitterness resting on his tongue, but he’s not that hungry anymore. “She said kids these days find themselves in weird places by accident when left alone with phones. When Estelle uses mom’s phone, I get a notification for certain keywords.”

“Right,” Apollo nods, sighing. He looks at his phone as if he wants to throw it out the window, and honestly, Percy wouldn’t be opposed. “Annabeth was probably watching what you were browsing with this, you know?”

Percy grimaces. “Why would she do that? Are you sure?”

“Lots of reasons, Percy,” Apollo pauses, hesitating. “Listen, I don’t want you to think I just want to ruin your image of her, or whatever good memories you have left with her—but if Annabeth was desperate enough to keep you to the point where she felt *she* needed to guarantee you’d propose by buying rings, I don’t doubt she used this to keep tabs on what you were looking up on Google or watching on YouTube. After all... knowledge is power.”

“I feel a little sick,” Percy says, pushing away his half-finished milkshake. He blinks away new tears that have nothing to do with food orgasms this time. “Why couldn’t she just... tell me?”

“Has Annabeth ever been good at communicating with you, Percy? At... expressing her doubts and fears to you, about your relationship?” Apollo asks, his voice soft and kind, warm. Memories assault Percy not unlike a weapon would, leaving him short of breath. “You know what, you don’t have to answer that, maybe I shouldn’t—”

“The one time,” Percy says, sighing. He hates this, he hates it. “The... the few times she was truly honest with me, it was always about Luke. She... she would argue with me about it for days straight. And, after he died, she just... the last time she told me something like that was in Tartarus. I scared her. She didn’t tell me so, but it was obvious. She told me not to do what I

did again, so I didn't, and even then she still—she wouldn't forgive mistakes. She loves to keep me guessing.”

“Percy,” Apollo starts, hesitates, reaches over to hold his hand in his and Percy would take it back if he didn't need the comfort right now, if it didn't feel right. “I'm so sorry, Percy. You don't deserve that. It's like... it sounds like you were dating a wall, until you actually tried something different and she snapped at you for it. She wasn't telling you anything, but she expected you to know it all.”

Percy snorts. “Yeah, seems about right. I just... this sucks.”

“It does,” Apollo nods, squeezing his hand, and Percy looks up at him, at the encouraging smile he throws at him. He sighs, trying to clear his head, and reaches out for his milkshake, half-heartedly having a sip. It makes him feel a little better. “What do you wanna do with this, then?”

“Uh, what do you mean?” Percy frowns, looking at the phone. “We get rid of the app, right?”

“Or,” Apollo raises his eyebrows, a glimmer of mischief in his eyes. “Or, or, we make sure to set off some of the alarms she has, to make her as uncomfortable as possible. I got an idea of what she might have been concerned about.”

“Isn't that kinda petty?” Percy asks, shifting in his seat. “Like, a little mean?”

“May I remind you that she picked out a venue and started a guest list for your fictional wedding?” Apollo raises an eyebrow at him, unimpressed. “And that she controlled your diet? And was probably overly possessive when anyone who came near you?”

Percy remembers that poor waiter again, and feels himself giving in. “Okay. Okay. Just this once, and then you get rid of the app. Got it?”

“Got it,” Apollo winks at him, and leans forwards on the table, gesturing for Percy to come closer so they can both look at his screen. He opens up his

browser, clearing his throat. “Alright, let’s start with ‘*how to have hardcore gay sex*’—”

Percy chokes on his tongue. “*Dude.*”

“Oh, you’re gonna tell me Annabeth doesn’t have alarms for what kinda kinky shit you might look up, even out of curiosity? For all the porn you might watch? She probably has every decent porn website and sex blog flagged,” Apollo rolls his eyes, and shamelessly starts randomly opening article after article on homosexual BDSM. “Come *on*, Percy, be petty. Be like me. Be mad. You have a right to be, and getting through your anger is good. I’ve seen you and heard you being petty and snarky before, I know you have it in you.”

“I...” Percy hesitates, closes his eyes, and counts to ten. Then he nods, taking his phone from Apollo. “Alright, here’s one: ‘*best type of lube for anal sex*’, and, I don’t know, you said you placed me on the way to Miami? Uh, let’s put in, ‘*gay resorts in Florida*’—”

“Nude beaches,” Apollo suggests, and Percy snorts, but types that in, as well, opening random articles and videos. It feels dirty, and he’s definitely deleting his search history later, but for now... yeah, this is fine. A little spook won’t kill Annabeth. “Choking kink. BDSM hookup website in Miami. Doms in my area. Leashing kink. How to clean up before having anal. Best flavored condoms to give blowjobs—”

“I think that’s enough,” Percy lets out a laugh, a little on the edge of nervousness, but he can’t find it in himself to feel bad. If Annabeth thinks she has a right to monitor his shit, regardless of whether they’re dating anymore or not, then this is what she gets. “You were starting to get specific there.”

“I got talent,” Apollo shrugs, his smile a little filthy, and Percy looks away from it, blushing. He knows Apollo has a reputation, and tries not to think about it too hard. “Do you even watch porn on your phone, by the way? Look up stuff like that? Or is this the first time ever she’s gonna get the alarm?”

Percy shrugs, watching Apollo take a sip of his milkshake. "I never look up sex stuff, so it'll be the first time. I don't know why people like it so much. Seems kinda boring to me. I just did it for the sake of it."

Apollo chokes on his milkshake to the point where some of it comes out of his nose. He spends a good couple minutes clearing his airways, and Percy makes sure to hand him over some napkins, eyes wide. "Dude, you okay?"

"I'm sorry," Apollo wheezes out. "Did you just say you find sex boring and have it for the sake of it?"

Percy frowns. "Yeah?"

"Why?" Apollo shakes his head, seemingly confused. "Percy, why have it at all if you're not enjoying it? I don't want to *assume* your sexuality or preferences, of course, but if you're not feeling sexual attraction, maybe—"

"It's not like that," Percy interrupts, blushing crimson. Gods, this is not a conversation topic he thought they'd end up on. Apollo quiets down, waiting to see whether he'll explain or not, and Percy decides to say fuck it. What's the worst that can happen? "At the start, when Annabeth and I started dating... *after* the wars, more like, we, uh, it was good. It was nice. I enjoyed it and I, you know, wanted to do more, but the more we... the more our relationship grew, even before we moved to New Rome, it started to feel strange."

"Strange," Apollo repeats, but he sounds more curious rather than puzzled now. "How so?"

"I don't know. I just stopped wanting to do that with her," Percy clears his throat, breaking eye contact. "Sometimes I wanted to, ah, have sex, even, but when it came to actually... doing it with her I kinda... dreaded it?"

"Well, if this was before you moved in together, I remember you being quite stressed because of school," Apollo says, very calmly, as if afraid that he'll spook him. "Maybe it was that?"

“No,” Percy bites the inside of his cheek, shaking his head. “It’s hard to explain, I just... it never went back to how it was before. I guess even back then I kinda knew that Annabeth and I weren’t made for each other, or something. But she expected it from me, by that point, so I just kinda just went along with it, because otherwise she got mad—”

“She got *mad* because you didn’t feel like having sex?” Apollo interrupts, his tone rising a little, and Percy shushes him, feeling like his head is gonna burst from how hard he’s blushing. “Sorry—what do you mean by that? She expected sex, so you just did it even though you didn’t want to?”

“Isn’t that normal?” Percy asks, and Apollo’s expression falls into sheer horror. Percy blanches. “Uh, I guess not.”

“Let me get this straight,” Apollo takes a deep breath, looking like he can’t believe this is an actual conversation they’re having. “You were fine when you started dating properly. But in those six months, it got stale, not out of lack of trying but out of lack of attraction *to her*, correct? Because you had no issue with your sex drive?”

Percy nods. “Yeah, ‘guess so.”

“But *then*, instead of her backing off, she *expected you* to have sex with her,” Apollo pauses, wincing when Percy nods again. “Percy, did she ever pressure you to have sex with her even though you didn’t want to?”

He doesn’t answer. Percy presses his lips together and avoids eye contact because when put like that, it sounds bad. It sounds horrible. And he can’t deny it. There were times where he wished they had separate rooms so that he didn’t have to deal with her initiating even though he insisted on being tired, or not being in the mood, or just wanting to sleep, or because he needed to do something else instead. Times where he hated the fact that they removed the locks from the doors, other than the entrance, because they’d agreed there should be no secrets between them—it was her idea and Percy should’ve thought twice about it—since it meant that she was allowed to get in the shower with him, uninvited, and he didn’t have it in himself to say no. He failed to stand up for himself.

The silence gets longer and longer, and then Apollo sighs. “Fuck, I need whiskey.”

“She didn’t...” Percy starts, hesitating, glancing at Apollo out of the corner of his eye. “It wasn’t like, you know, assault—”

“No,” Apollo frowns, his tone flat. “Barely, from the sounds of it, but I don’t want to have you relive any nasty experiences, okay? Coercion, yes, perhaps. It’s... Percy, you did say no to her, right?”

“Sometimes,” Percy admits. “And sometimes that worked out, and sometimes I... gave in anyways.”

Apollo closes his eyes and starts counting to ten under his breath. When that doesn’t seem to be enough for him to calm down, he starts counting to fifty. Around forty-three, he stops, opening his eyes and looking at Percy with a determined gaze.

“Crash course on consent, Percy,” Apollo says, using his teacher’s voice. Percy fully turns his head towards him, feeling a little awkward, but willing to listen. “Yes means yes, and no means no. Right? Right. There is no such thing as maybe, or perhaps, or possibly, or technically. None of that. That middle area is dubious, and murky, and very morally questionable depending on the circumstances; there’s such a thing as willingly having sex despite not wanting to, and never saying no, unfortunately. It doesn’t make it okay. Especially if you aren’t enjoying it. *Especially* if you aren’t attracted to that person. Especially if you *don’t* want to do it again.”

“But I—” Percy cuts himself off, doubting, but Apollo gestures for him to make his question. “We are—*were*, we were dating. Aren’t I supposed to —?”

“No,” Apollo remarks, pressing his lips together. “You could be married and in love for fifty years, Percy, but that will never make it okay to pressure someone into having sex, whether knowingly of the morality of it or not. No means no. And anything in between, if you ask *me*, should only be roleplay. Or previously agreed upon, so it’s actually a yes. But not everyone has that opinion so take that with a grain of salt.”

Percy frowns. "This is... weird, coming from a god."

Apollo's expression goes through what Percy would call awkwardness and disgust. "I know, I'm aware of the hypocrisy and double standard, but times have changed. Gods don't go around doing that anymore—most of us, anyways. Human culture changed and so did we, with it. I've always been a fan of enthusiastic consent, anyways. I wasn't myself after Eros hit me with that arrow, but I never touched Daphne, unless crying over tree bark counts."

"Sorry," Percy winces. He doesn't like the way Apollo's voice went flat at the end, there. He didn't mean to remind him of something like that. "That wasn't fair. I'm just, I'm a little—"

"You're processing," Apollo nods, relaxing a little. "It's okay, I get it. It's a lot to take in. I just want you to know, if you ever felt like... if you ever felt bad, afterwards, if you ever felt uncomfortable or inadequate, Percy, if you couldn't *perform* properly with her... you weren't the problem. Never. Is that clear?"

He swallows, but nods. Okay. It feels good to have reassurance about that part, in particular. About all the times he stayed up, unwillingly awake, after the fact, feeling dirty and wrong, like his skin wasn't his own. He thought every relationship went through that. He thought it was normal. He should've trusted his instincts, but Annabeth has always been an expert at making him doubt himself.

"Thanks," Percy says, glancing down at his drowning pancakes. He shoves one in his mouth, trying to feel less awkward, but he's truly grateful, and a quick glance at Apollo earns him a smile, soft and warm. He likes it a lot. Apollo's smiles are incredibly honest, unlike Annabeth's. Unlike his own, lately. They feel good. "I, uh, sorry about killing the mood..."

"Don't sweat it, Percy. It's... it's good to discuss these things. Your relationship. It'll make it easier for you to... Put your foot down, I guess," Apollo shrugs, frowning. Percy would rather have his grin back. "Annabeth doesn't seem like the type to back off, but rather to double down. You'll need strength for when you next talk to her."

“I know. Thanks,” Percy sighs, and gestures at the menu. “So... ice cream?”

Apollo lets out a laugh, nodding, and then his eyes twinkle with an idea. “Do you have an Instagram?”

“Yeah, but I never really use it,” Percy frowns. “Why?”

Apollo raises his eyebrows. “Why do you think? If Annabeth wants to see what you're up to so bad...”

“Oh,” Percy lets out, squinting at him. “You're *mean*.”

“Percy, if I was dating someone half as good as you are, I would be *insane* to treat you even a third of how she treats you. You're wonderful,” Apollo looks at him with earnest honesty, and Percy blushes from the roots of his hair down to his toes. “She deserves a little grief. Maybe like that, she'll realize that she didn't just ruin her relationship with her boyfriend, but also your friendship.”

Percy's breath catches. Wow. “I... I don't think we've been friends in a while, to be honest.”

“Even worse,” Apollo sighs, and then stands up to sit next to him, making him scoot over. “Come on, you're showing *everyone* what a good time you're having and with who. Don't quiet yourself down.”

Percy watches Apollo open his phone's front camera for him and panics. “I — I don't really like pictures and I look awful right now—”

“Shut up, you're gorgeous,” Apollo rolls his eyes, and his tone is so matter-of-fact that Percy can't find it in himself to deny it, blushing even deeper. “Just *one*, and then we make a photo shoot for the food, the real important thing here. Deal?”

“You're too persuasive,” Percy protests, and Apollo smiles at him, wide and cheeky. His breath catches a little, again. “Yeah, okay, whatever, just get it over with—”

Apollo ends up taking *several* pictures, claiming he needs to get both their good sides even though all of Apollo's sides are perfect. It's embarrassing but there's a mindless sort of fun to it that Percy appreciates, and when it comes down to actually posting the pictures, he has the perfect petty caption.

“*‘finally, some good fucking company’*, put that down,” Percy says, and Apollo looks *delighted*, as he types it and posts it. Percy chews his milkshake straw. He's finished it by now and that makes him really sad. “Do you have an Instagram? I don't think I follow you.”

“Yeah, let me just look it up—” Apollo cuts himself off, frowning at his screen. “Huh. You have me blocked.”

“*What?*” Percy snaps, leaning over his shoulder to see. He's—he's right. “Uh, I didn't even know you had an account, man, I don't know why—”

“Seems everything blond counts as a threat,” Apollo rolls his eyes, unblocks himself, and Percy's greeted to the side of a ridiculous amount of shirtless selfies. There are other pictures, of course, of beautiful photography, which Apollo double taps on on his behalf. But the selfies are, uh, distracting. “To be fair, I'm a bit of a slut, so—”

“You're not a slut,” Percy mumbles, tearing his eyes from the screen to look at Apollo's surprised eyes. “Er, I mean, you just... you just like having fun. Nothing wrong with that. It's just like you said, you have... talent.”

Apollo sighs, visibly charmed. “Gods, you're adorable. Annabeth has no idea what she lost.”

“Can we have that banana split now?” Percy asks, changing the subject, because Apollo's smile is getting too blinding. “I saved space for it in my stomach.”

“Of course!” Apollo calls over their waitress, orders one for them to share, and then winks at him, his voice playfully sultry. “Prepare for a *world* of pleasure, Perseus. You'll be begging me to have mercy by the end of it.”

Percy swallows, wide-eyed.

Somehow, he doesn't doubt it.

5. Chapter 5

Notes for the Chapter:

hmm annabeth...

how delusional can you get, huh?

It's officially been twelve hours since Percy took off, and Annabeth can't stop fuming.

She tells herself it's fine— she came on too strong and freaked him out. That's just like Percy; he often acts like a cornered animal, skittish and distrustful, and needs a guiding hand. He's always been like that and it's the worst part about being with him: he trips over his words too often and puts his foot in his mouth, says things he doesn't mean. It's why she's the one that talks, between the two of them.

He'll come around, after he realizes what he's done. Percy's guilt often outweighs whatever stupid things he does, and he's rather good at apologies. They can move past this, forget about the engagement for now so she can just focus on getting Percy back to earth. It'll be difficult to do so from Boston, but that's nothing a few weekly visits can't solve.

The concerning thing is whatever the hell he thinks he's doing, getting on a bus. Once back home from the restaurant, she took his laptop, since he wouldn't answer his phone, and of course Percy saved his passwords in his browser instead of hiding them in a notepad; just a few clicks and she was able to log into his bank to see his activity. After that, inputting his phone's information in a Find My Device website lets her lock onto his location— a few hours out of San Francisco, already.

She knows he's going to New York, so she calls Sally to warn her, but she won't answer. She texts her instead. She texts Percy, trying to get him to turn back, because at some point her calls start going straight to voicemail,

and really? He blocked her? Seems excessive, but Percy's reckless like that. It's fine.

She doesn't mean to pray to her mother to vent, letting out angry words, but Annabeth often finds herself doing so, over the last few years, wanting advice. She vaguely recounts the experience, since she doesn't want Athena to worry for no reason; Percy *will* come back, he's just being an idiot now. She should've planted the rings in his dresser instead, since it would've given him time to get used to the idea and realize they're been together for long enough for marriage to be the next logical step.

Annabeth decides to let it be 'till morning, only to see that he's... on his way to Florida. Well, that one is unexpected. His live location has also been off for a few hours, which means he somehow figured out how to turn off his GPS. He's probably just trying to confuse her. Well, it doesn't matter, either, but she doesn't want this situation to get... messy. It only takes a few seconds for her to book a taxi to San Francisco, then another few to book a plane ticket to New York. It's for the best. They need to talk about this, and Percy needs to wind down. Running away is not going to solve anything, and the faster they can be back on track, the better.

She'll have to explain to her dad what's going on as she waits for the proper time to head to the airport, but omitting a few facts won't hurt him. This is between her and Percy, anyways. No one else should get involved.

She's in the taxi when the parental control app goes off with a notification. She raises her eyebrows, since that's quite odd; Percy never looks up any of the words she has keyed in for him. His disinterest and cluelessness in anything sex-related or even dating-related has always been quite present, which she's just fine with, because if he wants any of that, well, he has her.

The actual words make her pause.

Annabeth takes a deep, deep breath, trying not to get altered. *It's fine*, she insists in her head. She's known about Percy's attraction to men for a while, now. It was fairly obvious. He doesn't have wandering eyes as much as unconcerned reactions and makes rather oblivious comments about it. If he's looking into these things now...

Even if he cheats, it's nothing. It's part of him freaking out— marriage is scary. She wouldn't blame Percy for wanting to make sure he has everything, well, straight, before committing himself. One girl she was friends with at UC Berkeley suggested Percy might be a closet case, because of how off their sexual relationship seemed, but that's a ridiculous assumption, and Annabeth hasn't spoken to her since.

Besides, it's unlikely Percy will find someone properly interested in him. He's never been the type to come on to people, always too passive, and if someone does show interest in him, it's likely he'll get cold feet.

She has nothing to worry about, really. Annabeth just wants things to be normal. Percy's decision to move back to New York put a wrench in the plans she's been making for them for years, but that's nothing a little distance making the heart grow fonder won't fix.

When she gets to her father's place, Annabeth pulls out her keys, lets herself in, and takes her shoes off at the entrance, dragging her baggage behind her. The house is unexpectedly quiet: none of the music her stepmom likes to listen to, or the games the twins like to play all day in front of the TV. But it's clear there's someone home, because her father's shoes are by the door, as well as a pair of women's shoes that she doesn't recognize. She frowns.

"Dad?" She calls, not daring to step further inside. Shuffling and muffled voices come from the kitchen, making her frown harder. She starts moving in, sighing, figuring maybe he's just with a coworker or something. "Dad, is that you? Sorry I came without calling, but something came up—"

In the kitchen, her father sits on one end of the dining table, nursing a cup of black tea that smells divine— the good brand, the one her stepmom keeps only for special guests. On the other end of the dining table is Athena, delicately sipping her own cup of tea, dark hair spilling down her back, in a pressed business suit, a tension to her shoulders that reminds her of Minerva more than it does her.

"Mom," Annabeth lets out, weakly. Her father shifts, awkwardly, as he often does, and she realizes he's frowning, avoiding looking at her. A bad

feeling starts to sink in. “I— I haven’t seen you in a while. What brought you here? Do you need help with anything?”

Athena lifts her eyes from her tea, exchanging a look with her father. This is — Annabeth’s always wanted to look at them together, but this is not exactly how she pictured it. It’s wrong. There’s a tension in the air that’s starting to psyche her out.

“Sit down, Annabeth,” Athena says, her voice cold and soft, making her swallow. On automatic, she obeys, sitting between them, at the side of the table. Athena finally looks at her, and panic starts to creep in as she recognizes the look— disappointment, embarrassment, anger, like she’s wondering how she could be her daughter at all. “There’s a few things we need to talk about. You’ve gotten yourself—and your father, and I—into a rather uncomfortable position. You are aware that the credit card you were given has conditions, right?”

Annabeth feels her cheeks pinking. “I—”

“You are aware,” Athena continues, interrupting, raising a delicate eyebrow. She casually slips a stray strand of her behind her ear, dark as midnight. Annabeth’s always admired her elegance, her stillness, her almost monumental presence, but she doesn’t know how to feel about this version of her mother, colder and distant than ever, directed at her. She’d almost rather get screamed at by Minerva. “That when you pray to me, you’re bound to choose your words rather carefully, right? Gods don’t have time to ask questions, Annabeth. You’re bound to be objective, and truthful.”

“Mom, I didn’t—” Annabeth tries, because she didn’t think she was actually listening, but Athena scowls, making her pause. She looks at her father. “Dad? What is going on?”

“Let your mother speak, Annabeth,” he says, still not looking her in the eye. “I’m sorry we’re being like this, but Athena can explain it better than I can. I don’t know how to tell you this, but this is an intervention. Just... just listen.”

“I had a rather interesting conversation with Apollo, last night,” Athena speaks, not giving her a chance to protest at the idea of needing an intervention. “After I had a bit of an... overreaction, regarding your news. I assure you, no harm came to Percy Jackson. Poseidon had quite a bit to say to me about my acts, however, especially after Apollo properly explained the situation. The rest of Olympus is having a field day, right now, rather delighted about my loss of temper.”

Annabeth feels the blood draining from her face. “You... you did something to Percy?”

“I just wanted to scare him,” Athena shrugs. “After all, you seemed quite altered in your prayers. Beyond yourself with rage, even. An eye for an eye, though, and we all go blind, don’t you think? I came here originally, to deal with only this matter, give you a few warnings, but your father and I have had quite a few interesting exchanges as we waited for your arrival... and I feel it’s time I exert my duty as your mother, beyond just my duty as your patron. It’s what all demigods want, is it not?”

She doesn’t say anything, too shocked. Annabeth just stares. Her father, as if this is some lovely, casual reunion, stands up to get Annabeth her own cup of tea. She notices, almost absent-mindedly, that he’s using the good china. Of course. She is shocked he hasn’t dropped it out of nerves.

“Marriage is a rather important decision, Annabeth,” Athena says, and she starts feeling nauseous. “It is legally binding and, for us gods, holds a sense of permanence that transcends emotion and reason. As a maiden goddess, marriage has never been my strong suit, but I would be foolish to deny the effect it has in everyone’s life. If one’s to be wise, it is only logical to respect those forces that bind both mortals and gods together. Do you think my father and Queen Hera wouldn’t have gotten a divorce by now, if it was to be taken lightly? That it was easy and simple for my father to divorce his first few wives? Do you think Aphrodite wouldn’t have signed off on Hephaestus as soon as Queen Hera turned her back on them? Do you doubt the seriousness of Apollo’s vows, when he swore he would never take a spouse? Mine and Artemis’, as well as Hestia’s, when we decided to remain maidens?”

“No,” Annabeth whispers out, voice weak. Athena remains impassive. “Of course I don’t—”

“Then it begs the question, Annabeth,” Athena interrupts her again, and her eyes, grey like her own, the other thing she really got from her beyond her brains, bore into her with heat, with anger. “Why would you think that you can persuade Perseus Jackson into marriage? Drop a ring on him that you got with your father’s hard worked money, without proposing but rather *telling him* to do so?”

“Mom, Percy’s dense,” Annabeth hurries to explain, feeling like the situation is getting way out of hand. “You don’t understand, if someone doesn’t plan the idea in his head he doesn’t—”

“And that’s what you decided to do, instead of just asking him, first and foremost?” Athena raises her eyebrows. “Instead of discussing whether he was ready to consider marriage at all, whether marriage is even a thing he wants in his life?”

She doesn’t say anything. Athena doesn’t know Percy as she does; if she did, she’d see the logic behind her decision. Percy has to be kept guessing, because if you give him all the answers, he’ll just mess it up, just like how she spent weeks trying to convince him that it was better to stay in New Rome or move to Boston rather than to go back to New York, only for him not to listen.

“You’ve embarrassed yourself, Annabeth,” Athena sighs, tapping her nails against the table. Disappointment drips from her tone, making Annabeth too nauseous to consider drinking her tea. “You’ve embarrassed me, and you’ve put Percy Jackson into an unenviable, disgraceful position. I barely kept Poseidon from enacting revenge on you, and Apollo barely kept us from starting a war over a misunderstanding.”

“I’m sorry,” Annabeth says, because it’s the right thing to do. Besides, she never meant to embarrass her mother. It’s the last thing she’d ever want to do. “I— hold on, Apollo? Why was he—?”

“You’ll find out eventually,” Athena dismisses her, standing up. Annabeth realizes that she’s leaving, and her eyes widen. Athena meets her eyes. “And I’m not the one you should be apologizing to. If anything, I’m last on the list. Your father is right here, and your stepmother should be here in short.”

“What?” Annabeth’s mouth drops open. “If this is about the ring—”

“Annabeth, I told you it was for basic needs and emergencies,” her father breaks in, and she turns to look at him. He’s finally looking at her, and his expression speaks of the same things as Athena’s: disappointment and regret. “An engagement ring— a *diamond* engagement ring, custom made, is hardly a basic need, or an emergency. I could overlook the restaurant bills, since it’s not like we’re hurting for money, but there’s a limit. Do you have any idea how your stepmother reacted when she checked the account’s balance? She thought there had been some mistake, or that something happened to you and someone stole your card. She’s at the bank right now, trying to figure out how to undo this.”

“Undo it?” Annabeth asks, dumbfounded. “But that ring—”

“You’re not engaged,” her father breaks in, softly. He seems to hate saying it to her, almost as much as she hates hearing it. “And even if you were, Annabeth, you should’ve asked about borrowing the money. This is not okay.”

“You’ll give your father the details about where you got that ring, and whatever else the bank needs to solve this issue,” Athena crosses her arms. “You will cooperate, Annabeth. If you plan on going to New York to meet Percy Jackson and discuss whatever is left of your relationship after this, then so be it. You have time to do both. From here on out, daughter, you’re released from your position in Olympus as an architect— we can’t afford further humiliation, so it’s best that you’re not seen in the city. And you need to do a lot of hard thinking.”

Before she can properly react or protest, Athena vanishes, leaving a slight scent of olives behind. She turns to her father, not knowing what to say or what to do— and then her phone pings with another notification. In a daze,

she brings it up, and realizes it's from Percy's practically unused Instagram account.

Everything grinds to a halt, as she looks at the pictures and the caption, at Apollo's dumb, handsome smile, the way his shoulders brush with Percy, the easiness of Percy's smile, one he hasn't had directed at herself in years.

Did Percy run to Apollo? They've always seemed too close for her comfort. When Percy started attending his classes and returning with wide smiles, so different from how he ended up when she played tutor for him, she decided to check for herself that nothing was going on until Percy just stopped going to his class— probably because Annabeth made sure to point out things Apollo got wrong, and he realized that he was better off with her.

Doesn't help that Apollo has a reputation. What are the chances Apollo's been interested, and took this as a chance to come in when Percy was in a weak position? Seems likely. It also seems likely that Percy might just fall for it; Apollo's just his type, smart, gorgeous, blond, clever, and skilled.

This calls for action. It'd be one thing if Percy cheated on her with a random nobody on his way to New York, another one entirely to fuck Apollo. He might end up getting turned into some plant, and she can't exactly date an actual piece of seaweed. Not that there's that much difference, considering how stupid Percy would have to be to get in cahoots with Apollo.

Annabeth stands, hurrying out the way she came, ignoring her father trying to speak to her. She'll figure that mess out later, not right now. She has other priorities.

A burner phone. That sounds brilliant.

6. Chapter 6

Notes for the Chapter:

THE BOOIIIIIS

Percy ends up so full that he falls into a food coma, which means it's Apollo's turn to drive. The sun is high-up in the sky, and Apollo notifies him of the exact time without needing to look at a clock, just casually glancing up and announcing its ten-thirty a.m. by the time they hit the road again. He tries to take a nap, but he finds it difficult when he can hear the murmur of the radio, feel the movement of the car. Percy's sleep has always been like death or so light that even a fly could wake him up, and he's never resented it quite as much as he does now.

"We need to get you a change of clothes," Apollo comments softly, chewing bubblegum again. Percy hums in agreement. "Maybe we could crash at a hotel tonight? Don't know if you're up for it, but we could take a shower, get some better sleep. Hit the spa—"

"Why would we hit the spa?" Percy asks, confused, throwing him a look. Apollo looks back, raising an eyebrow at him. "I mean, besides the obvious that it's nice, but, uh—"

"You deserve to relax, Percy. Get a massage. A mani-pedi. Maybe a mud bath," Apollo shrugs. "Just a suggestion. I know of a place that has a pretty decent sauna. And they let you keep the bathrobes, which is always a plus."

"I dunno if I have enough money to blow on a spa, to be honest," Percy admits. They split the diner bill at his request, because Apollo wanted to pay for all of it, but there's only so far he can go. "Moving back to New York isn't cheap. I've mostly got my med-school fund left. The rest is living expenses."

"Then I'll pay," Apollo says, and Percy starts protesting, but Apollo looks at him and shakes his head. "You're not convincing me this time, Percy. All

gods do is accumulate wealth. We're worse than your filthy billionaires. Besides, I didn't get you a birthday present this year—"

"I told you the extra classes were enough of a gift," Percy breaks in, but Apollo remains unfazed. Percy sighs. "You're gonna drag me to a spa even if I keep protesting, aren't you?"

"Well, not quite. Rather, I would tempt you until you aren't able to resist joining me in getting your nails cleaned up," Apollo throws him a wink, smiling, and Percy rolls his eyes, amused. "Just... let me do this for you. One nice gesture isn't gonna kill you, Percy. I won't suffer for it, neither will my wallet, and you could use a little pick-me-up, don't deny it."

Percy frowns, looking ahead at the road and crossing his arms. "Why are all of those good points?"

Apollo laughs. "I'm a professional debater, sweetheart. You can't pull a fast one on me—most of the time. I'm not known for consistency outside of certain areas. It's the downside of being the god of too many things, I suppose."

"Fine," Percy gives in, sighing. He's... well, he can't say he isn't looking forward to it. It sounds nice. Relaxing. Another way for him to clear his mind. "But that's tonight. Where are we going right now?"

"Uh, we'll check out the next gas station to see if they've got any clothes for you. But we're still a couple hours off the next town, so, if you'd rather wait—"

"Gas station is fine," Percy leans off his seat and fidgets with the radio, but there's nothing interesting going on at any of the stations. He glances at Apollo. "I'm guessing this radio has Bluetooth?"

"It's linked to my Spotify, go ahead," Apollo nods, and then starts smiling while Percy goes through his playlists, eyebrows going up higher and higher. "Yeah, I listen to literally everything, so—"

“I think everything doesn’t cut it, mister music god,” Percy snorts, and settles on the first thing he recognizes. Apollo bursts out laughing as Doja Cat starts playing, and he blushes, but refuses to feel embarrassed. “Listen, it was right there, dude—besides, she’s really good, and I don’t really get to sit down and enjoy music often, you know—”

“Jeez, forgive me,” Apollo chuckles some more, lowering his sunglasses. “I’m sorry, that was just—Percy Jackson, notable hero of Olympus, who only wears rock band t-shirts and has a resting bitch face, just casually picking out Doja... Gods, you’re full of surprises.”

If he weren’t driving, Percy would elbow him. As it is, he just rolls his eyes, but he’s admittedly amused. “You’re literally the only person who would find this funny.”

“Probably,” Apollo agrees. His smile is so wide it probably hurts, and Percy’s cheeks are starting to hurt from how much he’s holding back his own. “Well, are you just gonna sit there? Turn up the volume, Perseus.”

He’s about to, but then his phone starts ringing and he pulls it out of his pocket to see its mom calling. He winces, hesitating, but he should probably explain himself, at least a little. Warn her about some things. He feels bad about the way he hung up on her yesterday.

Percy accepts the call, bringing the phone up to his ear. “Mom?”

“Hey, baby,” Mom sighs out, audibly relieved. It makes him feel even guiltier, and he eyes Apollo, noticing that his grin is gone. It’s obvious he’s listening in, but Percy finds that he doesn’t mind. He’s helped him too much for him to do so, and he’s proven to be able to recognize bad signs faster than he has. “Thank the gods, you’re alright. How are you holding up, Percy? The way you sounded last night...”

“I’m—I’m doing better, mom,” Percy takes a deep breath, and takes off his shoes, bringing his legs up against his chest. He pokes at a hole in his socks, swallowing. “I found some company. It could be worse.”

“You’re with Apollo, right?” Mom asks, and Percy rears back in surprise. “I saw the pictures you posted. And the pictures he posted, too. I follow every Greek god on Instagram, honey, and some of the Roman ones too, just in case. Don’t ask me how I got those usernames—it’s a long story.”

The idea of his mom having her own bizarre, god-related adventures throws him for a loop, but Percy decides to dissect that later. “Uh, yeah, it’s—he’s driving me to New York. Our bus had a... malfunction, so we decided to just go ahead and drive. We’re doing okay. He’s... he’s been really nice.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Mom pauses, and Percy can tell the question is coming, so he closes his eyes, bracing himself. “Percy, what is going on? Annabeth’s been calling me, but since you told me not to listen to her I’ve been sending her to voicemail. I’m just... baby, what happened between you two?”

Percy takes a very deep breath. “Okay, mom, before I tell you, you have to promise to stay calm, okay?”

“Please, don’t tell me she’s pregnant,” Mom blurts out, and Percy chokes, coughing, letting out as many denials as he can while trying to remember how to breathe right again. “Oh, thank gods. Okay. I think I’m ready for anything now, sweetheart, go ahead.”

“I—well,” Percy wonders whether Annabeth being pregnant—however impossible that is, considering Annabeth is a neat-freak when it comes to sex—would be better or worse than what she actually did. He decides it’d be worse, and rips off the band aid. “She assumed that I would propose, so she went ahead and bought two rings, and asked me when I was planning to pop the question. She also told me she started a guest list and picked out a venue for our wedding and, gods, mom, she said it was *obvious* that we’d get married—”

“She did *what*?” Mom snaps, and Percy rears back again because that’s not a tone he often hears from her. “Oh, gods, baby, I’m sorry for snapping at you but—hold on, slow down, can you explain that again? I can’t believe it.”

Percy rewinds, telling her all about how she came up to him and told him to dress up because they were gonna have a fancy dinner in a restaurant that opened up recently in New Rome. About ordering their food and noticing how strange she was acting, being weirdly pleasant and purposely trying to be charming. About how, after their dinner came and they started sipping their wine, she just casually pulled out the rings. Then, he recounts their mess of a conversation, how everyone at the restaurant watched it, and himself walking out and buying a bus ticket to New York.

He notices Apollo taking in a breath and letting it out, during this, which makes him thankful again that he came across him and not anyone else. By the time he's done, Percy finds that he feels a little better than before; being honest with mom often has this result. He hadn't done it in a while.

"Holy shit," Mom lets out, and Percy snorts, nodding. Yeah, holy shit indeed. "Percy, I'm so sorry, that—that's awful, I can't even begin to explain how furious I am right now. If I remember right, I hid that Medusa head somewhere in my closet—"

"Mom, you're not turning Annabeth into a statue, oh my gods," Percy bursts out with a laugh, and Apollo makes a sound like he disagrees with that statement, so Percy throws him a stern look. Mom sighs like she also disagrees. "We're not doing that, no one is getting violent—"

"It's not *violence*—" Mom tries arguing, and Percy realizes this is what people mean when they say he's too much like her, more so than his dad. "I'm mostly kidding. Mostly."

"No, mom, I'm—I'm solving this myself, okay?" Percy shakes his head, ignoring the nervousness sparking in his chest. "I... just don't talk to her. Or let her in if she shows up at the apartment. I—I have to deal with her on my own."

"Percy," Mom sighs. "Will you be alright? You two have been together for so long. I knew there was something that wasn't quite right, but you two looked so in love..."

“Yeah, well,” Percy clears his throat, closing his eyes. He feels Apollo's hand cautiously wrapping around his wrist, squeezing in reassurance before retreating. He swallows. “I guess... I guess it wasn't enough to make it work.”

After that, Percy gives her his vague location, and mentions that they'll apparently be spending the night at a hotel resort. She says she'll call later, to which Percy finds himself being glad for, because she always makes him feel better. The next time they stop at a gas station, Percy finds some tourist shirts and no pants, but he can settle for that without issue. There's a muted energy between him and Apollo now, calm, thoughtful, but the silence isn't really uncomfortable and it reminds Percy of how tired he actually is, still.

They skip lunch for the sake of going straight to the hotel, which means they spent most of the day just driving, and Percy feels it in every single one of his joints. It takes very, very little convincing for Apollo to just... pull him into the spa area, guiding him through the rules and then leading him into a locker room, where he shamelessly starts getting naked.

Percy does something he hasn't done... in a very, very long time, if ever: he steals a few looks.

Now, is this ethical? Not really. You just don't stare at another dude's body in a changing room, but he's so, so tired, his eyes are heavy, and he's always been able to appreciate people's beauty without it meaning anything. Still, Apollo's far beyond the *usual* average meaning of beauty; every single one of his features is so carefully made into perfection in a way that makes his mouth go dry.

His tan is even and his skin littered with only a few Lester scars—a big one over his chest and smaller ones here and there—as well as the usual callouses from using a bow that covers his fingers. Every single muscle in his body is well-developed, thicker than Percy's own lean shape yet only in the way a casual wrestler might be built. His hair just about brushes his shoulders in delicate curls, dark blonde under the light of this room but seemingly soft.

But Percy's eyes, funnily enough, fixate on his arms and hands, the marked veins and the long fingers, the confidence behind every gesture they make, never out of place. It makes him feel gayer than ever, and rather inadequate; how come Apollo can just stand there like this, godly-perfect, an exemplar of beauty, and claim *Percy's* even remotely gorgeous?

He knows he isn't bad looking—mirrors aren't easy to avoid—but it seems silly to think he could ever compare, especially when Apollo clearly cares about maintaining his looks. From the way his hands are perfectly clean and manicured to how he checks his teeth in the locker mirror in case there's any food stuck in them. Meanwhile, Percy can barely remember to brush his hair most days and can't recall the last time he didn't have eye-bags or stains, or an even tan.

"Percy," Apollo calls, which makes him blink at the ground, where his eyes fell to at some point without him noticing. He raises his head to look at him, and meets Apollo's concerned, pretty baby blue eyes. He's fully naked now but Percy isn't curious enough to admire, *uh*, other parts of him. "Are you alright? Do you just want to go to bed instead?"

"Ah," Percy blinks, shakes his head to regain some consciousness. "No, actually, I'm just... thinking. That you, uh, you know. You're kinda pretty."

Apollo tilts his head, eyebrows raising in amusement. He looks back at himself in the mirror, then down at his body, and Percy makes sure to keep his eyes *firmly* above shoulder level. "Thank you. You're not so bad yourself."

Percy blushes, picking at the edge of his shirt. "Well, Annabeth used to say my only redeeming qualities are my eyes and build because I can't take care of myself for shit."

Oh. *Oh*. Right. Well. He didn't... realize he had another source for his insecurities apart from the fact that he's always hated himself a little bit. How curious. Saying that out loud made it sound...

"Crazy," Apollo shakes his head, frowning, looking at his own reflection with such fury that Percy blushes even deeper. "She's insane. You're—"

gods, *just* your eyes and your body? What the actual— I might have to sue her, Percy. I don't care if I don't have legal ground for it, that is an *illegal* belief. Especially since she apparently had no fucking issue with the rest of you since she seemed to love getting you to fuck her—”

Apollo takes a very, very deep breath, cutting himself off, and Percy just stares, speechless, as he gets himself back under control. They stand there for long enough that Percy turns back to his own locker, opens it, and starts taking off his clothes, hiding behind the door so he doesn't have to look at Apollo and Apollo doesn't have to look at him. It isn't exactly awkward—well, maybe a little—as much as it is just a genuinely shocked silence.

“Sorry,” Apollo says, clearing his throat. Percy just kinda stands there, holding his breath, nodding without realizing Apollo can't see him until he comes up behind him himself, his reflection showing up in the mirror, spooking him. Apollo winces. “Sorry— just... look at your reflection, Percy.”

Still in his boxers and shirt, Percy fidgets, and then does so. “I... you know, I mean, it's not like what you said was *wrong*—”

“I shouldn't have just snapped at you, though,” Apollo sighs, and Percy focuses on the mole resting on his neck, next to a sun-induced freckle, biting his lip. He tenses up like a cat about to enter fight or flight when Apollo leans in closer to him, breath brushing the back of his neck as his fingers tilt Percy's chin up, making him meet his own eyes. “But, just so you know... that face? A certain love goddess is secretly jealous of it. You would've made Helen of Troy look *dull* in her best attires. And even then, your soul is even prettier, and your heart beats it by far. Don't let anyone ever tell you otherwise. Take it from me— I've got an eye for art.”

Percy wonders if it would be appropriate to swoon and pass out into Apollo's arms again—and it probably would be—but all he's capable of is sputtering, blushing so hot and so red that he *very much* looks like one of his companion's sacred cows, and he even tears up a little.

“Apollo,” Percy lets out, weakly, then swallows, looking at his reflection. “That... is this why you've got so many children?”

He almost punches himself in the face. That is *not* what he meant to say and now he's swimming in embarrassment, flattery, and a rather distressed note of affection for Apollo's raw honesty, his effort to make him feel better. For his part, Apollo laughs, pressing his forehead against the back of Percy's neck and sending his heart into overdrive, his fingers falling from his chin to hold his shoulder, squeezing.

"You could say I'm good at compliments," Apollo shakes his head, and then steps back, taking away his touch and his warmth and Jesus fucking Christ, Styx swallow him up whole, he actually kinda misses it despite his inherent dislike of being touched and his claustrophobia being *a thing that exists*. "I'm gonna take that comment as one, Perseus."

"It... it was," Percy opens and closes his mouth, hesitating, still overwhelmed, but in a good way. It's been a while since most of his overbearing emotions are positive instead of negative. "I... thank you. For... for saying that."

Percy looks at Apollo's reflection, meeting his eyes. Apollo winks. "Please — like it took any effort. Now, Percy, don't take this the wrong way, but you should probably get naked now."

Right. They're gonna... do spa stuff. He had already forgotten. "Right. Are you... gonna look?"

"I—" Apollo raises his eyebrows, presses his lips together, then frowns, as Percy internally screams. He didn't mean to say that, holy shit, gods of fucking *Olympus*— "Um, I'm gonna go with *no*, even if you... allowed it, because, ah, well... I think you have... a lot to think about without having to worry about a god watching you in your birthday suit."

Oh shit, Annabeth. She's... a thing. Fuck. "That... makes sense. I— fuck. Fuck, I really need to break up with her."

Apollo blushes and Percy doesn't understand why until it's too late to amend his words, because they make it sound like he wants to get rid of her so that Apollo can look at him, and that's— that's a lot to process. Does he want that? No. Probably. Likely. He's blushing so hard, he's so tired, he

can't *think*; he just knows it feels good to take a few compliments and be looked at, just a little bit. It feels like his ego needs it. Actually— it feels like he's recovering the little, tiny bit of ego he had before he started dating Annabeth.

Well, then. He decides that's an issue for future Percy to deal with.

"I'll be at the mani-pedi section," Apollo finally speaks up, grabbing his bathrobe and finally covering up his perfection, like he's also decided this is something that shall not be addressed any further any time soon. It occurs to him that he just made a casually friendly, if intimate thing for two guys, into something very, very gay. Oh, well. "Find me when you're ready."

It takes Percy a few minutes, but he wraps himself up in his own bathrobe after removing the rest of his clothes. He keeps his phone with him in case mom calls again like she said she would, and to have something to do other than internally scream at how fucking gay that interaction just was for the rest of the night. He follows the signs pointing to the mani-pedi room and instantly makes a beeline for Apollo, who's speaking to the manicurist and telling her something that's making her blush as he approaches.

He watches, incredulously, as the girl pulls out her phone and gestures for Apollo to take it, only for him to make an embarrassed face. Percy raises his eyebrows, listening in. "Oh, dear, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to give you that impression—"

"Just have my number anyways," the girl giggles, and Percy clears his throat. Her eyes zero in on him and go wide. "Oh! Oh, my god, I'm so sorry, is this your boyfriend—?"

"Holy shit," Apollo mumbles, shaking his head. "Oh, gods, okay, I'm—we're not—"

"We have a discount for couples!"

Apollo's head snaps at Percy, and he nods, insistently. As a result, Apollo brings him in and wraps his arm around his shoulders. "Yeah, we've been together for five years, time really flies."

Call him cheap, but Percy grew up poor in New York. Denying a discount is basically sacrilege for him.

He doesn't really pay attention to the way Apollo chats this girl up about their long-lasting relationship, instead just sitting where she tells him to as she starts working on cleaning up his nails. Newsflash: removing your cuticles *hurts*. But he has to admit that, after a bit of work, his nails start looking less like he chews them out of habit every single day, causing little wounds and irritating his skin.

"Can I pick your nail polish?" Apollo asks, and Percy stops looking at his nails to glance at him, frowning. Apollo clicks his tongue. "Unless you don't want color, right—"

"I've never painted my nails before," Percy shrugs. "Well, maybe when I was like, four, but then my first stepfather beat me up for it—"

He stops himself, less because of the horror in Apollo's expression and more because there's a stranger listening in to their conversation in order to be able to do her job. Apollo clears his throat, and then, casually, carefully, as if trying not to spook him, just...

"I think this one would look really pretty on you. It matches your eyes," he says, holding up a green one full of glitter, eye-catching and, indeed, almost the perfect hue of his eyes, if only more intense. Then, Apollo holds up a blue bottle, just as shiny, but that instantly makes Percy perk up. "But I know what your favorite color is, so—"

"Blue will do," Percy nods, smiling, and Apollo matches his grin, visibly relieved. Percy sighs. "It's been a long day. My brain is just off into space. Words are just kinda... coming out."

"That's quite alright," Apollo hesitates for a second, glancing at the manicurist, and then takes his free hand in his—and Percy will be over-analyzing this moment in his head for days to come—before bringing it up to his lips and dropping a sweet, chaste kiss on his knuckles. "Don't worry about anything. Just enjoy yourself."

Easier said than done, but Percy tries. He enjoys the foot rub that comes after the manicure, even if he underestimated how thorough a pedicure could be. Then, Apollo drags him into the full-body massage parlor. He only ends up agreeing to a back massage because, uh, he doesn't fancy being touched *everywhere* by a stranger, but Apollo does go for the full treatment, which is done in a different room. They agree to meet up after they're done in the sauna.

Percy's mistake doesn't come until after he's done with the massage, and he's sitting outside the room Apollo went in, drifting off, thinking about how nice he feels, how much fun he's having, how relaxed his body is for the first time in ages. His phone vibrates with a phone call and he assumes, without looking, that it's just mom, fingers moving in automatic before he even processes that the call comes from an unknown number.

Percy frowns, bringing his phone up to his ear. "Hello?"

"Perseus Jackson," Annabeth says, and his heart stops. Everything around him quietens. Every good feeling in his body evaporates, and panic rises up his throat. A sigh comes through the line, when he fails to respond. "Well? You and I have a *lot* to talk about, Seaweed Brain."

Oh.

7. Chapter 7

Notes for the Chapter:

WARNING: annabeth.

also, a couple having an ugly argument. get ur popcorn.

“Annabeth,” Percy takes a deep breath, closing his eyes, curling in on himself on the chair. She remains deadly quiet. “What... what do you think you're doing?”

“Me?” Annabeth asks, and he can tell from her tone that she's holding back a scoff. “Percy, what is wrong with *you*? Do you realize how... childish, and weird it is for you to just take off running? How irresponsible?”

“Are you seriously going to pin this on me?” Percy shakes his head, squeezing his phone flush against his ear. “Are you seriously doing this, after all the bullshit you said?”

“Is our future together just bullshit to you?” Annabeth snaps back, acidic, toxic, and defensive. Percy flinches, then berates himself for it, tightening his jaw. “Since when have you been one to run away, Percy? I can't even remember the last time—”

“You're the one always calling me a coward,” Percy interrupts, and Annabeth makes a frustrated sound. “What, are you suddenly taking it back?”

“Why are you even bringing this up? I obviously didn't mean it, Percy, for gods' sake,” Annabeth lets out that sound she makes when she thinks he's an idiot: a sigh mixed with a growl. Like he's a terrible inconvenience. “You need to stop being difficult, Percy. It's just a couple rings. We don't have to get engaged now—”

Percy's throat fills up with knots of anxiety and panic, but he manages to push through. “And what makes you think we're *ever* getting engaged? Me

saying no just flew over your head?”

Annabeth stays quiet for a few seconds, then audibly takes a deep breath. “Don't say things you don't mean, Percy. Otherwise, you'll be crawling back to me in two weeks, saying I was right—”

“*Crawling back to you?*” Percy repeats in disbelief. “Why the *fuck* would I do that? Annabeth, are you seriously this far in denial? You’ve seriously deluded yourself so much that you can't—you can't understand what's happening?”

“And what's happening, Percy?” Annabeth asks, accusing as always. Percy can conjure up her exact frown from memory. “Enlighten me, what have you decided to do after more than twelve hours being an idiot?”

Percy grits his teeth, eyes burning. “We're breaking up, Annabeth. That's—that's it. I don't *want* to get engaged. I don't want to marry you. I don't—gods, I don't want to live in Boston or San Francisco or get that fucking white picket fence dream with you or, or have *kids* with you, gods, you'd be such an awful mom and I don't understand why you can't just accept that it's *over*.”

Nothing, for a moment, and then: “It can't be, Percy. Not after all we've been through. You *promised* we'd always be together—”

“I was sixteen!” Percy snaps back, and his vision gets blurry with tears. Oh, gods. This hurts. This hurts, this sucks and he *hates it*, all of it, so much that he hates her, too. But instead of heartbreak Percy feels like he's purging poison out of an old, festering wound that would've otherwise killed him. “Annabeth, I was *sixteen*. I loved you. You—you were one of the first constants in my life, I barely had anyone but you and Grover and mom for so long, but I didn't realize that being with you meant not being with anyone else!”

“And what is that supposed to mean?” Annabeth sounds worked up, her voice choking. “What the fuck do you mean by that?”

“Are you gonna pretend you haven't always *hated it* when other people got my attention?” Percy asks, running a hand through his hair. “Not even people hitting on me. *Anyone*. Especially Rachel—she's one of my best friends and she can't even speak freely with me when you're around because she knows you'll give me shit over it! I had Apollo's Instagram account blocked without knowing he even had one! And when the *fuck* was the last time I saw Estelle? Or Paul? Or mom?”

“You chose not to see them willingly, Percy,” Annabeth tries, somehow still denying reality. “I never forced you to do anything. Besides, Percy, what's so wrong with your girlfriend being your friend? Or keeping an eye on your relationships so that people don't exploit you because you *love* trusting anyone, just like you're trusting Apollo? Trusting a *god*?”

“You sound insane,” Percy pulls at his hair, shaking his head. “Annabeth, *listen to yourself*. When did you turn into this?”

“I've always been the same!” Annabeth protests, and a series of realizations start to sink in for him. “You're the one that's always changing, Percy! You're the one that can't just stay still and let life happen, and I have to keep up ahead of you all the damn time, because otherwise you're just gonna run off like you're doing right now!”

There was this occasion, a couple years back, around Annabeth's birthday, in which Percy looked at her and realized he wasn't sixteen anymore. Or fourteen. Or twelve. It had been a sobering moment, and he recalls, amidst that feeling, how a part of him wondered: how come Annabeth still feels like she's a teen, when he feels like he's already gone through three midlife crises?

He's started to realize the answer to that question is simpler than he thought it'd be: in her head, Annabeth stopped growing up the second Luke Castellan died— if not before that.

He was never in competition, after all.

“Annabeth,” Percy says, softly, hearing her labored breathing from how she's raised her voice. “Do you even like me?”

“Don't start with that bullshit,” Annabeth scoffs. “I love you, Percy. Even when you're being like this.”

Gods, it makes his skin crawl. “Are you happy with me?”

“Not right now,” Annabeth sighs. “Not when you're being stupid. But every other day, yes. Of course. Would I be with you otherwise?”

“Annabeth,” Percy pauses, and wonders if he'll ever be able to wash off this feeling, like he's been showered in misery all over again. “Have I ever compared to Luke? Have I ever been what you wanted? Will you *ever* just *let go* of him?”

This stuns her into silence, and Percy lingers on the line, feeling like he wants to curl up and sleep and never wake up. Gods, gods, he's—all those times she told him she loved him. All those times she looked at him like he was the only thing keeping her grounded... it was just a hoax. Something he desperately bought into, just as much as she did. Percy's never been enough. He never will be.

“Was I always just second-best?” Percy finds himself laughing, sniffling. “Should I have dyed my hair blonde? Wore contacts? Maybe killed a few hundred demigods in cold blood, including your own friends? Stabbed Thalia in the back? Should I have asked you to fucking run away with me in the middle of a fucking war—?”

“Stop,” Annabeth says, voice even, but Percy hears the edge of desperation, of panic. “You're speaking madness, Percy. Luke was a brother to me. He has nothing to do with this.”

“If he was a brother to you it's a good thing we're fucking Greek,” Percy snorts, bitter, and Annabeth makes a sound like she would love to have her hands around his neck. “You—you tried to control me, Annabeth, like some fucking wild animal, like I'm *barely* human. You used my concern for my sister against me to set up a way to spy me, you've logged into my social media, you've tried to keep everyone ten feet away from me, and you—in Tartarus, you looked at me like I *disgusted* you, and you've never been good at hiding it.”

“Percy,” Annabeth tries, but he's barely picking up heat. “You're blowing things out of proportion—”

“You've kept me such a short leash that I can't even remember who I was before dating you,” Percy cuts in. “All because you've always looked to me like Luke's replacement and in your head he was a hero, but he was just like you and me, Annabeth! He was scared. He was angry. He made a mistake. And even that wasn't enough to make him change his mind. He asked *you* to run away. He knew he'd have to die otherwise. If I've ever met a coward it was him, and I can't believe you're so blind to it.”

“Stop talking about Luke!” Annabeth snaps. “He has nothing to do with us, Percy! He's dead! Get over it—why would I be dating you if I just wanted him?!”

“Because I was there,” Percy rubs his eyes, a little too hard, and then clenches his fist, nails digging into his palm. “Because I was easy.”

Annabeth laughs. “Easy? Do you know how much work I've had to put in to make this relationship work?”

“Then *stop*,” Percy lets out, his voice breaking. “Annabeth, just *stop*. Get help. I can't—you're gonna kill me. If I stay with you I will *die*, and I haven't loved you in so long, I'm not sure I ever did anymore. Just *stop*, please, I'm *begging you*—”

The door to the room Apollo went into opens and he walks out, whistling, smiling a relaxed, happy grin. He looks around and then his eyes fall on Percy; his smile widens for a fraction of a second and then it falls flat. He walks towards him with long, fast strides, setting a hand on his shoulder and looking down at him with dawning horror.

“Percy?” He asks, and squeezes his shoulder when he fails to answer. “Percy, who are you speaking to?”

“Is that Apollo?” Annabeth asks, her voice so cold it sends a shiver down his spine. “Tell me, is he even a good fuck?”

For a second, Percy's too stunned to speak, looking up into Apollo's eyes as they widen in shock, clearly having heard her, and then a rush of heat goes through his body and he's letting out angry, uncontrolled words.

"I hate you," it goes. "Holy shit, I can't fucking believe you just said that, gods—you know what?! I *wish* I was fucking him! I *wish* he was fucking *me*, because then it'd be twice as easy to get you to fuck off! Are you—you're out of your mind, I don't ever want to see you again—"

"Tough fucking luck!" Annabeth screams back. "You think you're just gonna break it off like this, over the phone? You'd be dead without me, you can't do anything right—!"

"I wish I hadn't followed you into Tartarus," Percy snaps back. "I wish I never saved you from Luke, I wish he had taken you, holy shit, you're the worst thing that's ever fucking happened to me—!"

Apollo makes a panicked, helpless sound, and suddenly Percy finds himself lacking his phone. He blinks, then looks up at him, only for Apollo to smash the phone on the ground so hard it breaks open, screen cracking, insides spilling out, line immediately dying.

"Fuck," Apollo says, staring at the phone. Then he turns back towards Percy and takes both his shoulders in his hands, crouching to look up into his face, his fingers digging a little too hard into his skin. "Fuck, Percy, are you okay? Are you alright? Holy shit, I'm so sorry I left you alone, I can't believe this just happened—Percy? Percy, you need to focus on me, okay? Can you do that?"

Percy blinks, swallowing the bile rising up his throat, and looks Apollo in the eye, barely hearing anything other than his own heartbeat, shivering, and his body strangely cold. "I... don't feel so good..."

Everything gets a little fuzzy, and next thing he knows Apollo's carrying him, bridal-style, inside an elevator up the hotel's floors. Percy vaguely recalls that they hadn't even gotten a room yet, since they checked in at the spa first thing, so he figures he's missing a lot.

He blinks and suddenly he's looking at the ceiling, laying on a bed, and Apollo's hovering over him, lips moving but none of his words are processing, a worried frown pulled over his features. Percy watches as his hand reaches out, not feeling like his own, and presses his finger against the concerned wrinkle between Apollo's eyebrows.

“Just smile,” he mumbles.

And for the second time in less than twenty-four hours, Percy passes out cold.

Percy's nightmares usually involve reliving memories. His failures, his low moments, pulling him into a circle of desperation and madness and pain. This time however, it's different.

He never thought Annabeth could look so horrible in a wedding dress. Her hair perfectly done up, like a princess, her make-up the best it's ever been, her eyes bright enough with happiness that they burn. He stares, mute, but Annabeth reacts as if he was answering her words, lips moving but no sound reaching him.

There's a sudden cut, a skip, as often happens in dreams; Annabeth's holding a baby, and she looks tired, but she hands it over to him and Percy looks down into grey eyes and dark hair, mom's nose and Poseidon's lips, Mr. Chase's jaw and Athena's eyebrows—

He wakes up gasping, coughing, and shuddering in horror as he gags. Instantly there are hands on his shoulders pushing him back down against the bed, since he woke up so hard he sat up, and after a few seconds of panicked processing of where the fuck he is and who the fuck is touching him, he realizes he's looking at Apollo, leaning over him, keeping him down.

“You—” he tries, but his mouth is too dry and he chokes again. This time, Apollo rubs his arms, trying to keep him from panicking again, and after Percy feels like he can talk, he tries again. “You... what?”

He's... not the most eloquent, sometimes, but Apollo seems to get it anyways. "You had another fainting spell on me. You're alright, though. Your blood pressure just went through the roof... which isn't a good thing, by the way, but I managed to get you some nectar to sip on. You're good. You're *safe*, Percy, I promise that."

"Oh," Percy clears his throat, and watches Apollo reach for a water bottle, uncapping it before offering it up to him. Percy tries to take it but his strength is just not there; embarrassingly enough, Apollo ends up having to feed it to him. "I—thanks. Thank you."

Apollo doesn't say anything, and the silence that follows allows him to wind down enough that he hears rain falling faintly, a murmur of water drops hitting the window. Percy breathes, softly, in and out. Then he sighs.

"I'm sorry," he says, rubbing his eyes, incapable of looking at Apollo. The situation is starting to crash in, all the terrible things he said, the dream—the nightmare—he just had. Oh, gods. "I—holy shit, I'm *so sorry*, Apollo, I—I don't know what the fuck just—"

"Percy," Apollo cuts in, his voice gentle. "You're the last person that needs to apologize right now, sweetheart. What... what are you even sorry for?"

Percy curls into himself, fetal position, pressing his head into the pillow. "The things... the things I said, gods, I was awful, I was *horrible*, and when she mentioned you, holy shit, I shouldn't have said that—"

"Do you want a hug?" Apollo suddenly asks, and Percy uncovers his face to stare at him in shock. Apollo stares back, his expression going from concerned neutrality into a helpless little look of sheepishness. "Percy... Don't worry about me. I've heard far, far worse, and those people actually meant it. She just got on your nerves and you snapped. Everyone has a limit."

"Still," Percy protests, insisting, shaking his head at him. "I don't... I don't like being like that."

“Percy, it's...” Apollo pauses, hesitating. “You're allowed to feel like that towards her. You are. It might sound bad to you but you can't possibly expect your heart to just be alright with everything she's put you through—what she keeps putting you through. It's alright to hate her, either just a little or a lot.”

“But...” Percy's lip trembles, and he swallows, biting the inside of his cheek. “Apollo, I just...”

“You need to relax,” Apollo sighs and sits beside him on the bed, taking Percy's hand in his, intertwining their fingers. He squeezes, three times, rubbing his thumb over his knuckles. “It's alright. You're safe with me. You're allowed to just... feel.”

The words stab through Percy's chest, a pain that hits him sharp and hard and leaves him breathless. Safe. Safe, when was the last time he was safe? When was the last time he trusted Annabeth when he fell asleep at night? When was the last time he trusted her before that?

Percy doesn't have to ask for a hug since Apollo lays down and pulls him in, soft, gentle and warm, already knowing he's given in to the offer. It's like he knows he's going to cry, because he cradles Percy's head against his neck and wraps his arm around his body, rubbing his back. And, gods, it feels good.

It feels good to let go and accept that he's been used, gaslit, humiliated and manipulated for years. Taken advantage of, even. Catharsis washes through his body with each wet sob and sniff, and Apollo just holds him, tighter and tighter, not saying a word until Percy calms down slightly.

“You'll be alright, Percy,” Apollo mumbles against his ear, and he feels the press of a kiss against his cheek, chaste and soft. “It hurts a lot now, but it's not the end, okay? Your life will keep going. You'll be as happy as you deserve to be. Maybe you'll even meet someone who'll know how to treat you right... But for now, we can make do with some crying.”

“Thank you,” Percy lets out, between sobs, hands grabbing onto Apollo's bathrobe and desperately pulling him closer. “Thank you, thank you, thank

you—”

“It's nothing,” Apollo chuckles. “Just basic human decency, Percy. A tiny bit of kindness. It took me a while to get it right.”

Percy sighs, and rubs his face, a little too shamelessly, against Apollo's bathrobe to clean up some of his tears, but he really doesn't care much about decorum right now. “I just... it hurts so much, but it also feels so...”

He drifts off, and Apollo hums. “Relieving, perhaps? Maybe even good?”

“Yeah,” Percy admits, hiccups and groans because of it. He *hates* hiccups. “It's— it's weird. I just got so much off my shoulders that I didn't even know I had.”

“Your relationship was wearing you thin, Percy,” Apollo says, patting his back. “Actually, from what I've heard, it was bringing the worst out of the both of you. Annabeth... It seems like she hasn't realized that it's okay not to have life all figured out. It's okay to be helpless. Believe me, I've witnessed mortals failing to get it perfect over and over in all my years, and there's not one person out there that hasn't had to stop, that hasn't had things go so bad you wonder how they were ever good.”

“I never wanted perfection,” Percy mumbles, opening his mouth to speak again only to get interrupted by a hiccup. Ugh. Apollo has the audacity to chuckle. “I'm gonna— *hic!* Oh my gods, this is awful. Stop laughing.”

Apollo makes a dubious sound. “I don't know, you sound really cute like that. How could I not laugh?”

“You ass— *hic!* Fuck,” Percy takes a deep breath, ignoring the way Apollo breaks out laughing. “I'm trying to be serious here.”

“It's okay, I get it,” Apollo snickers, and Percy weakly swats at his arm as another hiccup rattles his body. Holy shit, this is so annoying. “You never wanted your life to be perfect. You just wanted gods to stop butting into it, but Annabeth seems like the kind of girl that has... higher standards.”

“She showed me a PowerPoint presentation once,” Percy tries to not wrinkle his nose at the memory, but it’s truly awful, so he stops holding back. “It was a fifteen-year plan for us. It accounted for us having kids exactly five years after she got a job because she wouldn’t risk her career for maternity leave.”

Apollo doesn’t say anything right away, then he coughs. “Please, tell me you’re joking.”

“That’s what I said to her,” Percy shrugs. “She didn’t take it well. Honestly, I treated the whole thing as a joke anyways. I never... I never thought she actually intended me to propose on a certain timeline...”

“Would you ever have done it?” Apollo asks, and Percy makes a dubious sound, disgusted at the idea. He shakes his head. “Yeah, sounds about right. Some relationships, no matter how good or how bad... They have an expiration date. It seems yours was far overdue.”

“At least four years overdue,” Percy admits. “I should’ve run away the second that she... started acting weird about Luke again. I guess the war kept her mind off of it. Not that I don’t think about him on occasion, but...”

“He wasn’t ever a good part of your life?” Apollo suggests, and Percy supposes that’s the best way to put it— even if very early on, Luke was a friend, it was hardly the friendship of a lifetime. More than that, he was a role model because of his teaching, but he trampled on that image of him in his mind so fast and so hard that Percy never had any illusions of him ever seeing reason before it was too late. He nods. “I might have to get my son to do some therapy for you and Annabeth— separately. Actually, now that I think about it, I’ll help you file for a restraining order. All she’s done could potentially hold weight in court in regards to stalking—”

“We’ll see,” Percy snorts, and waits for a hiccup. It, mercifully, doesn’t come. He snuffles and rubs his face against Apollo’s bathrobe again. “Man, you’re cozy.”

Apollo laughs, as Percy blushes. His brain to mouth filter hasn’t come back at all yet. “Thanks, I’ve been told I’m a great cuddler. But you should

probably get some more rest. It's still quite late. You were only out for a couple hours, and we have a road to hit tomorrow."

Percy hesitates. "I'm not sure I'd like risking more bad dreams, to be honest. The one that woke me up was, uh, a straight-up nightmare."

Apollo hums. "I'll make sure you have none, then. Pinky promise."

To Percy's surprise, Apollo actually finds one of his hands and curls their pinkies together. He blinks, and then finds himself letting out a snort, smiling slightly. Okay. Yeah, okay. This feels good.

"Fine," Percy sighs, trying to sound less willing than he actually is. "I'll trust you, this once."

"*Just* this once?" Apollo asks, cheeky, and Percy rolls his eyes, cuddling closer, pressing his smile against the skin of his neck. "You've forgotten to say no homo to our cuddling, Percy. I'm afraid we're legally married now. It's bro code."

That shakes a laugh from him. "Fuck you, man."

Percy closes his eyes to the sound of Apollo's soft laugh, filling his body with heat like a warm, cozy blanket. He's asleep within seconds, and it's the best, easiest, sleep he's had in ages.

8. Chapter 8

Notes for the Chapter:

apollo horny on main 24/7

Apollo makes the very altruistic decision to get Percy a new phone, break into his New Rome apartment to steal things that he thinks Annabeth should be kept fifty feet away from (like his laptop) and not wake him up until he does so naturally.

Just curse her, a tiny voice in his head says. It sounds a little bit like Aphrodite which is rather concerning, since it could actually be her. *Turn her into something unlovable and free him.*

Oh, it's tempting. Infuriatingly so. If he was a little more selfish and a little less human, he would, but he knows better than anyone that the best way to heal from heartbreak like this is to purge it out of your system day after day. Besides, Percy would be sad, if not angry, in that selfless way he is.

Apollo understands rather well why relationships break down, why they turn toxic, why love can bring out the ugliest sides of people, but he's still reeling at all the red flags that flew over Percy's head. He doesn't know what kind of background he has, exactly, but it's almost like he folded to it—like he thought that that was the type of love he deserved. And he knows this because it's how Percy's acted about the whole situation, slowly processing that no, of fucking course it's not alright have be coerced into having sex. Of fucking course he's beautiful. Of fucking course he deserves someone who will treat him like the *prince* he is.

Like you? That little voice says again, and Apollo glares at nothing, annoyed. It's very much his subconscious, alright, because now it sounds like Artemis. *Don't say you don't want it.*

Well. He won't. If *he* had Percy he would be buying him flowers every single day and showering him in so many compliments that his skin turns permanently red, but Apollo's long stopped being the kinda guy that tries to

pull while the other person's going through some shit. Mostly. Barely. Temptation has always been somewhat of a cheat to get him to do things.

Would he love fucking Percy until he cries and remembers or even *realizes*—a horrible thought, but he can't imagine he and Annabeth ever having had good sex—how amazing it could be? Yes. Of course. He's not blind. The only thing keeping Percy from being visited by godly competitors for his heart is his taken status and his father. Which, the first is gone now, but Apollo personally has a couple more restrictions... like the fact that they're sort of friends, and also he knows his infatuation with Percy's whole being would be entirely too much, too fast for the type of relationship he's coming out of.

But gods, that *ass*. The way his neck looks like it was made for him to wrap his hand around. Apollo knows a fresh new hell.

When he comes back to their hotel room, Percy is still desperately hugging the pillow Apollo supplanted himself with, curled in on it. His bathrobe has come undone and he can see more of his skin than that one Instagram account that's always on the prowl for Percy's patches of skin could ever dream of, freckles and moles and scars painting a picture that would leave any weak man or woman breathless.

Apollo just happens to be breathless because of poor air ventilation, obviously. Surely. No question there. He makes sure to politely avert his eyes as he gets on with the task of ordering room service for breakfast, since it's nearing ten a.m. already. Percy's been out for a while now, so he's going to wake up starving, and Apollo wants to be prepared.

He's just about done with the task when a groan comes from the bed, followed by Percy's voice. "Apollo?"

He turns, watching Percy's slightly raised eyebrows, his cute bleary eyes and his confused gaze. It's awfully adorable. "Slept well, my friend?"

Percy frowns. "You left the bed."

Apollo starts sweating, obviously, because having Percy Jackson accuse him of leaving him alone in bed probably checks off a wish-list item he didn't know he had.

"I apologize, Percy. I decided to do some... errands," Apollo watches as Percy pouts, and that inappropriate, godly part of him goes *just take him, he's practically halfway there* but Apollo has self-control. Ish. He cuts it even by flirting. "Hm, do you plan to keep me as your cuddler from now on?"

Percy rolls his eyes, more awake now, but he still blushes like hell. "I guess you're a step up from a body pillow."

"Oh gods," Apollo lets out, because every time Percy says a nice thing to him he internally starts yelling, but he manages to segway it properly. "I'd make an *amazing* body pillow. I saw so many in Japan, and I'm *technically* an idol. I can picture it now, I'll have undies on on one side and be completely naked on the other side—"

"I'm sure it'll sell," Percy says, mustering up a smile. It's not as sharp or as wide or as bright as Apollo wishes it would be, because when Percy threw him that one wild look yesterday— well, it's better if he doesn't linger on it. Some things should stay in his fantasies. "You got any food?"

"I already ordered you breakfast— brunch, actually. It's about to be eleven a.m. already," Apollo informs him, shooting him his best *why yes I'm amazing at taking care of people, especially pretty boys* smile. "Did you actually sleep any better?"

Percy pouts his lips slightly. "It was great, but I guess I'm just... well, it's hard to be in a good mood."

All of Apollo's good disposition evaporates and he frowns, eyes looking off at the window's curtains. He knows Annabeth has, technically, already been punished. Losing her job as an architect should make her agonize enough. Athena had been all-too-willing at his suggestion.

But he thinks of the coldness of her voice, *is he even a good fuck?* And the way she addressed Percy in those text messages, the way she sounded everywhere between distraught, angry and disbelieving in those voice mails.

How to bring her pain? Apollo has a way with cruelty and she's offended him enough, and Athena's angry enough at her, that he could get away with a little revenge. If not for himself, for Percy. There are so many choices, from taking her skill with a pen away from her forever, to making sure she always gives the wrong answer during job interviews— even just actually fucking Percy, or as much as touching his skin, would sting enough to satisfy his current rage.

Alas, the second Apollo glances at Percy, half-naked and nervously toying with the undone knot of his bathrobe, it all evaporates.

Being human can be so overrated. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Percy doesn't seem keen, hesitating. “I guess I just... feel a little guilty, still. Annabeth always said it would be bad if I lost my cool, so...”

A deadly arrow wouldn't hurt, right? Ugh.

“That's ridiculous,” Apollo rolls his eyes, words coming out more bitter than he intended them to be. Percy just looks down at his lap, fingers tangling together, so Apollo comes over and drops beside him, letting their shoulders touch, nudging him softly. “Take it from me, I've lost my cool a lot. So has just about every mortal and god I've ever met. It's not about keeping a leash on emotions, Percy, it's about finding healthy outlets. It's not exactly something you're told, unfortunately. Humans are emotionally stunted by the society you've developed... not that gods are any better.”

Percy brings his knees up to his chest, peeking from his bathrobe. He's noticed how often he does this, making himself smaller, making sure he isn't taking up space, keeping himself tight, all limbs and corners accounted for. It makes Apollo want to reach out and find the button that'll set him loose.

“I’m just unsure,” Percy says, his voice soft, leaning his chin on one of his knees. Apollo looks at the skin there, and maybe he should hesitate but fuck it, he’s a physical person, and he knows how good a comforting touch feels, so he reaches out and sets a hand on the other knee, squeezing, watching Percy stare at his hand as if he doesn’t know what to make of it. “And I don’t even know what I’m unsure about.”

Apollo considers Percy’s options from here, trying to put himself in his shoes: halfway through moving to New York, broken up with a crazy girlfriend, evidently lost about what to do now that the rug has been pulled out from under his feet.

“We can try to put some order to things. Slowly,” he sighs, glancing at Percy to see his nervous shrug. “First off, you need to cut her off even more than you already have and... I’m a step-ahead in that regard.”

Percy raises an eyebrow. “Yeah?”

Apollo stands and grabs the backpack he abandoned earlier, with Percy’s things. He brings it over and pulls out his laptop, which makes Percy’s mouth drop open. Apollo clears his throat and pulls out the new phone he got him—a newer model, as well, because, alright, Percy’s too pretty not to spoil—and that just makes Percy blink slowly, processing.

“I’m sorry I smashed your phone, for the record,” Apollo shrugs, sheepish, then gestures at the laptop. “And I got nervous about her having any access to your stuff. This is... this is a good way to make sure she doesn’t have anything to hold against you, in the end, other than her own... well, just to be nice, her own *personal* feelings.”

“Uh,” Percy lets out. “Did you uh, break into my apartment?”

Apollo stares. “I’d rather call it a friendly intervention.”

A laugh startles out of Percy, filled with nerves and disbelief. “Okay. Okay. Did you find my stash of edibles?”

“Oh my *gods*,” Apollo snorts, shaking his head as Percy runs his hands over his face, helplessly giggling. “Oh my gods, I will go back and get it *right now*, please tell me that's real.”

“No,” Percy wheezes. “I ran out ages ago. Annabeth and I tried them for fun and she hated them. I had to give the stash away to Piper because there was no way I was gonna do all that alone.”

“Boring,” Apollo sighs. Ah, to see Percy under the effect of a few highs... now that sounds wonderful. “Okay, whatever— I didn’t see anything else that I thought she could exploit. I considered taking a hard drive, but it had her name on it, so I just left it. Do you need anything else?”

“Nah,” Percy shakes his head. “Mom already has the rest of my stuff anyways. Did you get any clothes?”

Oh. “Uh, might have forgotten the bathrobe is not your natural state of being.”

Percy opens and closes his mouth, blushing. “You just like looking at me.”

“Fuck, called out,” Apollo lets out, mumbling, and Percy covers his mouth with his hand in order to hold back a new laugh, this one, from the looks of it, a little more hysterical, and a little more filled with joy. “Caught red-handed. Sorry, sunshine, I *promise* it wasn’t on purpose.”

“I’ll let it slide for now,” Percy snorts, nudging Apollo’s shoulder with his own, and then grabs his laptop. He frowns down at it. “Oh, this is on. Did I forget about turning it off?”

He opens it, and Apollo has a bad feeling the second he notices his browser is minimized. Percy stares at it, hesitating, and when he finally opens it, it’s to a message about his bank session being expired.

Before Apollo can do something stupid like infect Annabeth with a personalized plague, Percy forcibly shuts down his laptop via the power button, slams it shut, and shoves it back in his backpack, scowling.

“Hand me the phone,” Percy snaps, then winces. “Sorry— I just need to do something, really fast.”

Apollo wordlessly hands him the phone, worry creeping into his mind. “Is this going to be a good thing or a bad thing?”

“A good one,” Percy grumbles, unlocking the phone and staring at how empty it is before opening the dialing app. He writes a number down from memory, hits the dial, and sets it to speaker. “You’re gonna love it, don’t worry.”

“Alright,” Apollo relaxes. If there’s anyone he can trust, quite honestly, it’s Percy Jackson. He offers up a hand. “Wanna hold my hand for emotional support?”

Percy grabs it without even looking at him, digging his nails into his skin. Gods, Apollo can imagine what they’d feel like against his back... which are probably thoughts that he should shove far, far back into a corner of his mind. Really not the time.

“Hello?” Comes the voice of Hazel Levesque, and Apollo instantly smiles. Ah, that’s a good phone number to have memorized. “Who is this? How did you get this number?”

“It’s Percy,” Percy goes, and Hazel lets out a relieved sigh. “Sorry, I kinda, uh, changed phones. And numbers. Make sure to get this one to Frank.”

“Sure!” Hazel quips. “Hey, I heard you... went out of town, or something? People were saying some weird things about your date night with Annabeth.”

Percy grits his teeth, closing his eyes. “Yeah, about that— we broke up.”

“Oh,” Hazel says. “Oh. I— sorry?”

“Don’t be,” Percy snorts, but Apollo sees the edge of pain and bitterness to it. “I’m gonna need you to take away her key to my apartment.”

“Oh, wow,” Hazel pauses for another second, probably trying to make heads or tails of whatever is going on. After she’s done, she seems to take it surprisingly well. “Okay, it’s the apartment we gave you, so I can do that. Issue is, I think she’s in San Francisco right now...”

“Change the lock,” Percy immediately says, making Apollo’s mouth drop open. He makes eye contact with him and mouths *you menace*, which makes him smile, relaxing, his shoulders dropping. “Yeah, just— change the lock. I don’t care. I’m sorry if this is a little sudden, it’s just... things got ugly and she’s doing even uglier things. I’m headed to New York and apparently she’s following me. When she goes back, just make sure she has to deal with you and Frank when she moves her stuff out.”

“I don’t think she’s found a place in Boston yet,” Hazel points out, and Apollo curses under his breath. “Are you sure about this?”

Percy stares at the phone for a few seconds, frowning, then nods. “Yes. I am. It’s... it’s for the best, Hazel.”

“Well, you got it, then,” Hazel says, and then her voice turns sheepish. “Percy, do I want to know what happened between you two?”

“Not yet,” Percy sighs. “But I’ll tell you guys. I just... I need a break. I need time for myself. Thank you for doing this.”

“Hey, what are friends for?” Hazel reflects Percy’s sigh, audibly smiling. “You’re with Apollo, right?”

Before he can open his big mouth, Percy covers it with his hand, which is rather *rude*. “Yep, he’s driving me to Manhattan. We gotta hit the road, so I should probably go. I love you. And send Frank all my hugs and kisses.”

Hazel laughs. “Alright, Percy. Have a great time.”

Percy hangs up the phone and removes his hand. Apollo pouts at him. “Aw, I wanted to say hi.”

“I just wanted to get it over with, sorry,” Percy grimaces, dropping the phone on the bed. “What a mess. Can’t I just go back to sleep?”

“Oh, no,” Apollo’s alarm bells ring. “Nope, that is just going to make you feel worse. You need joy right now. Something good. Something fun. As soon as we get out of here, we’re going swimming.”

Percy raises an eyebrow, but he’s starting to smile. “Swimming?”

“It’s your thing, isn’t it?” Apollo shrugs. “I know a lake. Extra salty, like you, even. We’ll have to turn around, which will make the trip longer, but...”

“Okay,” Percy looks at him, biting his lip. Oh, damn, Apollo envies those teeth. “Alright. I don’t have a swim suit.”

Don’t say it, his subconscious begs, don’t do it.

“Have you ever been skinny dipping?” He asks, shamelessly ignoring his own advice. Percy opens and closes his mouth, going beet red, before shaking his head. Apollo smirks. “Oh, wonderful. Everyone has to try it once, Percy. *Especially* if you’re a child of the sea.”

“Um,” Percy lets out, weakly, his eyes wide. “Ah, I mean, okay. Okay, I can... try.”

Apollo squeezes his shoulder and leans into his space, shooting him a look from under his eyelashes because he has no sense of self-control or even self-preservation. Fuck, he can’t stop being a flirt. “You and I are about to have a *great* time together. Do you agree?”

Percy visibly swallows, and perhaps unconsciously, his eyes wander down, to the skin of his chest visible thanks to Apollo’s own half-undone bathrobe that he has not changed either, and then they snap back up to his face.

“I...” Percy starts, licking his lips. Apollo pulls some of his best self-control tactics and starts thinking about Zeus and his mom having to have

done things in order to keep himself from letting out a desperate, horny noise. Maybe he needs to get laid. “I hope so?”

Apollo ruffles his hair and looks at the hotel room’s door, trying to ignore how much he’s sweating. “I guarantee it, sweetheart.”

Before Percy can say any more—and he doesn’t know whether this would make the situation better or worse—there’s a knock, and someone calls *room service!* from the other side of the door. Hallelujah, God and Jesus exist, because if this had been done by any other god, they would have just barged in and either laughed in his face or handed him a box of condoms. He knows his kind too well.

Percy’s nose twitches. “Breakfast?”

Apollo sighs, nodding. “Breakfast.”

Is there some sort of bingo for *Apollo Making Questionable Choices That Will Bite Him In the Ass Later*? Because he feels like he just won it, and the prize is digging his own grave.

Oh, well. At least Percy’s pretty.

9. Chapter 9

Notes for the Chapter:

smut. :)

The second they're ready to go Apollo turns back around and charts a route for the Great Salt Lake. Percy doesn't know much about it other than it's really salty, and inhabited, and Apollo tells him that there's yacht clubs nearby. The rest, well— a lake is a lake, and the closest body of salt water they'll encounter for a while on this trip.

"It's not that deep," Apollo warns him, shooting him an apologetic look. "Only thirty-three feet. But, I suppose it'll do."

"It's fine," Percy shrugs. "I can just soak. How salty is super salty?"

"Saltier than the ocean," Apollo says, and glances at him out of the corner of his eye. "Please don't tell me you're considering drinking from the lake."

Percy hums. "I mean, I *could*—"

"Do not drink the salty lake water, oh my gods," Apollo snorts, smiling bright. Percy sighs, enjoying that view. Seeing Apollo smile is starting to feel comforting, and he has no idea what to make of that, just like how he has no idea why he agreed to skinny dipping with a god. It sounds like a Greek myth in the making, if he didn't know that Apollo isn't like that. "Hey, are you... I mean, how are you feeling now? A little better?"

He wishes he didn't have to think about it. That he didn't have to examine his feelings and try to put a name to it. The heartache that clouded his mind during that phone call has slowly, almost painfully so, faded into plain old sadness, resignation, with a tiny bit of guilt. Annabeth's words still ring in his head *after all we've been through*, and he has to wonder if that's how she always saw their relationship.

Something convenient. Something easy. Something that would just stay the way it is, as if Percy hasn't always been as unpredictable as the sea, even to himself. He can't help imagining that his uncomfortable feelings of unhappiness were how mom felt after so many years with Gabe. He figures it's similar; she got so used to his presence and the superficial consistency and the safety for her child that it brought that she just.... forgot she could walk away, until he reminded her of that fact and gave her a tool to escape.

It's very much what Apollo's given him, in the shape of this road trip, since he could've easily just dropped him off in New York the second they ran into each other. He's giving him... something to work with. Something to claw himself out of the pit he's been in ever since he followed Annabeth into Tartarus, thinking *she's the only one who'll ever love me* somewhere in the back of his mind, desperate and young and naive. Blind.

It makes him feel like he wants to die, in a way he can't describe. Bury his feelings and his pain and just remain a corpse, but he looks at Apollo and remembers that, of course. Of course. He can heal. It'll just... it'll just hurt a lot, first.

"I..." Percy pauses, licking his lips. He curls into himself, shoulders hunching, but that just seems to be his reflexive response to hard truths as of late, like his body is trying to retract into itself. Like it's trying to cease to exist, somehow. Apollo reaches out and wraps a hand around his wrist in support, and Percy takes a deep breath. "I feel awful. I think... I think I'm grieving. It feels a little like that. Mostly, though, I just feel dumb."

"You have no reason to feel dumb," Apollo shakes his head. "Things happen, Percy. That's how it's always been. Everyone always thinks 'oh like it's hard to just say no' or 'how could you not realize you were suffering?' but it's just not that simple. That's not how emotions work, that's not how processing works. It takes getting it wrong to get it right and unfortunately, especially when you're young, you often don't realize it until you've already been broken."

Percy snuffles, trying to subtly wipe away tears from his eyes. Apollo's grip on him squeezes, and he manages a smile, tiny, wobbly, but a smile nonetheless. "Why does no one ever tell you that?"

“No one can teach you what to do when... when someone you love, or you thought you love, hurts you,” Apollo presses his lips together, eyebrows narrowing like he’s recalling his own disgraceful moments. “No one can teach you what to do when you’re the one that hurts them, either. Just like how all humans are different, all relationships are different. And sometimes it’s no one’s fault. Sometimes it’s your fault. Sometimes it’s the other person’s fault. Sometimes it just... is. And there’s not a lot we can do about it other than try to heal.”

“You’re...” Percy shakes his head, letting out an incredulous laugh. “You’re better at words than I usually give you credit for.”

“Sometimes I find gold,” Apollo shrugs, looking away from the road to shoot Percy a smile, soft and kind. His heart skips a beat. “You’re quite a good muse for that, I suppose.”

His brain disconnects. “Don’t you have nine women for that sole purpose?”

Apollo laughs, eyes shining. He throws Percy a wink. “Oh, I love them dearly, but they pale in comparison— just don’t tell them I said that.”

Percy says nothing. He’s speechless. The heat on his cheeks is blazing, too much to handle, so he just nods, biting down on his lip, looking ahead at the road. Gods. Apollo makes him feel like a fresh spring morning, like everything is soft, and light, and full of possibilities. He isn’t sure he knows and Percy isn’t sure how to *let him* know but gods.

He pretends his heart isn’t swelling in his chest, rabbiting, and entertains himself by taking charge of the music. Putting Doja back on doesn’t feel right with the way his blood is rushing through his veins so he just picks something random that he doesn’t even recognize, and stays quiet for the rest of the ride.

When they arrive at the lake, the sharp scent of saltwater cuts through the air and Percy feels his body instantly unwinding, everything slowing down. It’s not the ocean but it feels a little like it and that’s enough for him, even if it isn’t that deep. Suddenly, he’s itching to get into the water, and he’s trying not to show his impatience as Apollo walks him from the car to shore.

There's not a single soul around but them, and the lake stretches on wide and long enough that he can hardly tell where it ends and the sky begins. He's instantly in love with it. Apollo nudges their shoulders together to get his attention.

"It was a good idea after all?" Apollo asks, and Percy tears his eyes from the water to look at him, his eyes a brighter blue this close to water, his hair shining under the sun. He stares in quiet admiration for a few seconds before clearing his throat.

"The best idea," Percy confirms, licking his lips, ignoring how fast Apollo's eyes snap down to catch the gesture. His mouth is suddenly dry, but the second he looks at the lake again he relaxes again. "Fuck, really good idea. I can't wait to take a swim."

Apollo sighs and, before Percy can even blink, takes off his shirt. "Yeah, well, try to catch up with me."

And then he starts walking, taking his clothes off as he goes. Percy stands there staring after him, stunned, and chokes when Apollo finally reaches his underwear just as his feet touch the water, sending it flying behind him with not a care in the world and giving Percy a full view of his ass. He audibly chokes, furiously blushing, and has to fight with his own will to take his eyes off Apollo's body, looking into the distance instead, swallowing.

Oh gods. He can't believe he's doing this. Would Apollo mind it if he backed down? Probably not, as long as he takes a swim. Percy doesn't *have* to get naked, he could just swim in his underwear and save himself the insecurities and mortification of showing his naked body. Annabeth always said that there's a time and a place for everything and she found the swim team uniforms too revealing, both for the men and female teams, and Percy's always been a comfort over fashion kind of guy, so he used to just keep himself fully dressed around the apartment—

Wait.

He's thinking about Annabeth. He's— he's thinking about the decisions he made to behave around her to make her happy and agreeable. He's thinking

about her opinion on something like this, that she would find scandalous, impractical, unnecessary, maybe even dangerous. Dangerous like him. Dangerous like that fan account for him that's always trying to get pictures of him at his swim meets that she absolutely hates.

Just... for how long has Annabeth had an effect on his body? Or, more like, on how he himself treated it? He made himself have sex with her when he didn't feel like it, he made himself refrain from cooking meals like the ones he grew up eating, and he kept himself modest because he knows that Annabeth hates it when anyone except for her gets to look at him.

And now he's here, with Apollo, being offered a choice to... to reclaim his freedom. His body. Himself. To start healing and moving on and Percy knows it'll take a while for him to be able to date anyone again, but this also feels like... the start of something else. There's no use in downright denying it. There's something here that fills his chest with hope and light and he doesn't dislike it at all.

So Percy takes off his shirt, undoes his belt, slips out of his shoes and socks. Apollo's swimming by now, trying to get to a deeper spot, but Percy sees him turn and look at him and stop. He sees him stare, with a tilt to his head, questioning as Percy stands in his underwear and gods. Gods, that feeling of his eyes on his skin makes him feel all sorts of things that he doesn't know how to identify.

So he looks away as he finishes getting naked, until the sun hits every corner and crevice, every scar and freckle and mole, every patch of skin that has never seen light like this before.

And gods, isn't that a thought, with Apollo's eyes on him.

When he gets into the water, Apollo raises his eyebrows at him, visibly struggling to keep his gaze above shoulder height. "Feels good?"

The words send a shiver down his spine for no reason he can identify. The water isn't that cold, after all. But he knows what he means. "It feels... liberating."

“I’m glad,” Apollo lets out a sigh, smiling, like it’s actually relieving to hear him say that. Percy’s heart squeezes at the reminder that his concern is real, genuine, heartfelt, despite how casual Apollo tries to act, how easy he’s trying to make this for him. “Well... enjoy yourself, Percy. You’re in your element.”

He is. Floating here, at the deepest part of the lake, saltwater on his lips and the tranquility of feeling the stillness of this moment, of the lack of people, not even a single yacht around... he’s never felt more balanced than this before. Not in years, at least.

“Thank you,” he says to Apollo, several minutes in, floating on his back. Somehow, nakedness now seems to be the least of his issues, and he sees Apollo closing his eyes, head tilted up to the sun, bathing himself in light. It’s breathtaking. “For all you’ve done for me. You don’t know how... how nice this is for me.”

“I’m enjoying myself too,” Apollo cracks an eye open to wink at him, stealing a smile from Percy. “Sometimes there’s nothing more healing than a bit of water and a bit of silence. And good company, of course.”

“You’re right about that,” Percy closes his eyes himself, tilting his head back until all he can hear is the water pressure, a loud silence. Someone else would describe it as deadly but all Percy hears is the whisper of strength, the flexibility of it, the feeling that the water might pull you in and never let you back out. Power. All-consuming, scarier than lightning and darker than the dark itself. He loves it. “I was thinking...”

“Hm?” Apollo hums, as Percy takes his ears out of the water. A touch brushes against his hand and Percy turns it, letting Apollo tangle their fingers together. Somehow, it makes him feel warmer than Apollo’s eyes on him do. “You’ve been doing a lot of thinking lately. You are allowed to rest it up.”

“I just realized I’m a lot like mom,” Percy lets out a laugh, a little bitter and a little pained. He swallows when Apollo squeezes his hand, but can’t stop. He feels like... like someone should know. And Apollo is the only one who he’d want to know. “Just... she was with a bad man, before Paul. She got so

used to him. I got so used to him. And I don't think I ever realized how much that fucked me up until now. Everything with Annabeth... it ended up so similar, if not as extreme. It's like I was so used to the alarm bells sitting at ten that I couldn't recognize a five."

"Personally," Apollo sighs, and his grip around his hand comes to wrap around his wrist instead. Their palms slide together as it happens, and Percy can't help but wrap his fingers as best as he can around Apollo's own wrist, feeling like this lock is bringing them even closer. "I think the ten left you so deaf, you thought it became a five."

Percy snorts. "Maybe. I just... I never thought I'd end up here."

"Skinny dipping with a sun god?" Apollo asks, and that makes him laugh, shaking his head. With barely a thought, Percy takes control of the water and pulls at Apollo's feet, down, and laughs even harder when he starts freaking out, cursing and almost going under. "That is so rude! You little shit!"

Percy's only response is to do it again, which causes Apollo to retaliate, making him straighten up as he pushes him under, and for the next hour or so it's just this: the sound of laughter and curses, Apollo choking on water, Percy trying not to feel every brush of skin when they run out of energy and Apollo leans his head on his shoulder from behind, an arm around his middle so they can float together, his chest against his back.

"Percy," Apollo says, breath ghosting I've his skin and making him shudder. "I can't begin to explain how lucky I feel to have even a drop of your trust."

His throat chokes up, but Percy manages a small smile that Apollo can't see anyway. "That's so sappy."

Apollo laughs. "Well, some say the best stories have to start somewhere, right? A little drama won't hurt."

Shortly after that, the sky starts getting dark, with clouds gathering overhead. They stare up at the weather in silence for longer than they

should, and by the time they decide to get back to the car it's started drizzling.

Percy will admit that he watches Apollo dress up again and he knows that Apollo watches him back. Something builds in the silence, other than the rain, which is starting to look like a storm, and they both linger outside the car, getting wet, and standing side by side as Percy sets his hand on the handle of the passenger seat.

"I had fun," Apollo says, licking rain off his lips and leaning his elbow against the top of the car, leaning into Percy's space. From this distance he catches the scent of saltwater on his skin and strawberry bubblegum that somehow he still has left and had been chewing on early this morning, after breakfast. His heart rises up to his throat, throbbing in his ears, as the rain starts falling harder and harder. "Lots of fun. I... Percy, I don't want to assume I'm reading things right, or stretching my luck, but am I... am I imagining this?"

He doesn't specify what he means and Percy doesn't need him to, because the feeling in his chest is there, loud and restless and making him weak in the knees. "No. You aren't."

Apollo hesitates. "And that's... good with you?"

Instead of answering, Percy looks down at his lips, wondering when the last time was that he wanted something like them so badly. When was the last time he felt like he could kill for a kiss? "Can you kiss me?"

There's a beat of silence that makes the rain sound even louder, falling even harder, making a steady rhythm against the car, making his hair stick to his head, flattening Apollo's curls into a dark liquid gold. It's so tense that Percy thinks he might snap under the pressure of his eyes, looking into his with an intensity that already has him breathless, but then Apollo's eyes flash down to his lips and Percy knows it's over.

He moves in, brushing their lips softly. It makes Percy shiver and let out a rather desperate sigh when Apollo moves back, looking at him to gather his reaction—to gather how much he wants this because he knows Percy

hasn't wanted anyone in a really, really long time, and he sees the realization in Apollo's eyes, that he's allowed in.

The second their lips meet again is like everything snaps into hyper focus, and Percy's gasping, groaning as Apollo immediately slips his tongue into his mouth. It's hot and heavy and wet, both from the rain and the way it's so, so messy, but, fuck— it's good. It's wonderful. It lights an almost unfamiliar fire inside him and he struggles to place it, until Apollo presses him against the car and their hips collide and *oh*.

Oh, this is how desire is supposed to feel like. He never knew. This heat, the way he's sweating, the adrenaline running through his veins and the blood rushing in his ears, his heart wild against his chest.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Apollo bites his bottom lip and Percy moans, desperately so, because he's all too aware of his body now and he can't get enough of Apollo, how his kiss tastes like strawberry bubblegum and how his hands grip his hips, strong and almost as needy as Percy feels. He tangles his fingers in Apollo's hair, pulling him closer, and it earns him Apollo grunting and then slipping a hand down to the back of Percy's thigh, just to raise it and hook it around his waist. It gives him better access and makes Percy shudder from head to toe, noises escaping his mouth in a chorus of lust and need.

“Holy shit,” Apollo lets out, breaking away, breathing hard, only to take a chance at Percy's neck, biting so hard that Percy lets out a startled, loud *ah!*, shivering even more. “Fuck, I want to make you *mine*.”

Oh, gods. Percy kinda wants him to do so, too. “I—gods, do it, I can't stand this—”

“I shouldn't,” Apollo says, but he's squeezing Percy's thigh and his hips rock forward and the noise Percy lets out is straight out of a porno. Apollo curses again. “Styx, you're just *gorgeous* but I don't wanna be a rebound—”

“Not a rebound,” Percy gasps out, looking into his eyes. Apollo looks genuinely stunned. “*Not a rebound*. This is you and me—only thing that makes any fucking sense right now. Holy shit.”

“Don't wanna just be fuck buddies,” Apollo continues, and Percy nods in agreement, rocking his hips forwards, watching as Apollo swallows at it. “Wanna spoil you *rotten* and show you off and *ruin you*, gods, it could be so good.”

“Ask me on a date in six months,” Percy decides for them both. As much as this is not a rebound he would like to have some time alone, not tying himself to anyone. Much less so a god. But gods, he'll give it a chance. “Then we'll see. Now, though—”

“Yeah,” Apollo agrees, and starts undoing Percy's belt. They shouldn't have gotten dressed, is a thought that vaguely slips into his mind, underneath the panicked excitement of being touched by him. By *Apollo*. Holy shit. “Gonna make it so good for you, baby, you're still gonna be drooling in six months.”

Any words Percy would have to say get lost as Apollo lowers his zip and presses his hand inside his pants, over his underwear, against his dick, instead letting out a noise that he's never done before, high and loud in his throat, wide as his mouth drops open and he presses his forehead to Apollo's temple, closing his eyes, moaning like he's never been touched in his life before.

“*Fuck*,” Apollo lets out, pressing even further against his cock and Percy makes another sound that makes him blush out of embarrassment, even his shoulders and ears going warm. “*Fuck*, that sounds so pretty, you're so *amazing*—”

Percy shudders and his hips move on their own, thrusting out. His hands squeeze Apollo's hair as the movement causes friction and then Apollo properly takes him into his hand, slipping his underwear down, wrapping his fingers and his palm around him and pumping once and *holy fucking shit*, this is the hottest thing he's ever done and he's barely being given a handjob.

“Open your eyes,” Apollo says, coming out of his mouth like a demand and Percy does, greeted by the sight of Apollo's hand around him. He whines, thrusting his hips out again, and Apollo follows the gesture. He almost

chokes on his own moan, watching his cock in his hand, how Apollo's fingers squeeze *just right* and his thumb presses against the head, rubbing, coaxing an obscene amount of precum out— “Yeah, that’s right, baby, just like that. Feels good?”

Percy has a flashback to when he asked the same question earlier and feels himself tearing up, every nerve end in his body lit up like it’s the Fourth of July and the night sky is filled with light. “Oh, gods, yeah, yeah, it’s good, fuck, *Apollo*—”

Apollo gets on his knees and something in his brain cuts off, shutting down. Their eyes meet as he looks at him, and Percy ends up bringing a hand up to cover his mouth as he watches Apollo lean in and wrap his lips, pick and plush and *sinful*, around the head of his cock.

He doesn’t stop watching. He’s completely hypnotized as Apollo shows off his skill, easily taking him inch by inch with a pace that feels slow for Percy’s benefit rather than his own, like Apollo doesn’t want to make him combust quite yet. But then he sucks him, swallows, pulls back and then back in and Percy’s eyes roll up, his legs shake so badly that if it wasn’t for the car he’d be on the floor, and it doesn’t take long for him to finish after that, not at all, not with Apollo’s pretty eyes on him, with that raised eyebrow and cocky edge to the corner of his mouth like he knows exactly what he’s doing to him.

His orgasm has his tears spilling over and Percy bends forwards, thrusting his hips, watching Apollo take it with no difficulty and swallow down his cum, sucking as if he’s enjoying it, and Percy— gods. He can’t handle this, he’s shivering so badly that he has to lean on Apollo’s shoulders and a full-body spasm shakes him as Apollo pulls back with a wet sound that shouldn’t echo this loudly under the storm above them, yet does, burning itself into Percy’s brain.

Apollo stands, pulling him into his arms and cooing at him and running a hand over Percy’s hair as he lays kisses all over his lips and his cheeks and his face, telling him how good he did, how good he was as if he even moved a finger, as if Apollo didn’t do all the job.

There's only one thought in his mind, though. "You... are you hard?"

Instead of answering Apollo presses his body up against him and Percy feels the nudge of his cock, warm against his belly. He swallows as Apollo hums. "I'm quite alright, though, you don't have to—"

Percy turns around and lowers his pants the rest of the way down, ignoring how embarrassing this is, how daring, how desperate, but his body is full of energy and joy and light and he just wants to make him feel good.

"You can— you can fuck my thighs," Percy says, pressing his forehead down against the roof of the car, leaning his elbows on it. When he gets no response, he swallows, and clarifies. "You know, between my legs—"

"Oh my gods," Apollo interrupts, and his hands come to his hips, squeezing, a bruising grip that has a spark of arousal lighting up in him. "Fuck, fuck, *fuck*, Perseus Jackson, you're going to leave me *ruined*—"

He says that, yet he grabs him and nudges his ass further back, making him keep his legs close together. When Percy feels his cock slipping in between his legs he shivers and slams a hand down on the car roof because fuck, gods, holy shit, holy shit, that's *good*.

Apollo is so rough. He fucks his thighs like he wants to fuck his ass, pressing his lips against Percy's ear from behind and moaning, letting him know how much he's enjoying it. At some point Percy gets hard again but it's all very hazy, and gets even harder to keep up with with a straight head because Apollo wraps his hand around his dick and from there on it's like they've been doing this for years. Like this is all he's ever wanted and all he's been waiting for. Like Apollo already knows his skin like it's his own.

Afterwards they stand there, breathing hard. Percy's knees are non-existent and it's only Apollo's arm around his waist holding him up. The rain starts to let up as they catch their breath and sunlight starts peeking through, heating them up, dripping wet and basking in the afterglow.

Percy feels sunlight hit his cheek and tries to straighten up only for Apollo to hold him closer, hugging him, burying his face into his neck from behind

and kissing him and gods. His heart has never felt more fragile yet so strong.

“Apollo,” Percy rasps out, his voice shredded. He got so loud near the end, he’s sure that anyone in the area that might have heard an echo of it is going to believe this place is haunted. “Apollo, you can ask me out in three months instead.”

Apollo laughs against his neck, his free hand coming up to run through Percy’s hair. He pulls his head back when he reaches the nape of his neck, a move so dominant and possessive that Percy’s breath cuts off and he lets himself be tilted back, throat bared, looking up at the sky as Apollo bites and sucks a hickey into his skin.

“Can we hang out in the meantime?” Apollo asks, not sounding like he’s serious, but Percy knows he means it. “You know, for studying.”

Percy snorts. “Sure. But only if you make my coffee.”

“Deal,” Apollo nods, and kisses up to his ear, biting his earlobe. Percy almost closes his eyes at the shiver that runs down his spine. “Is that a rainbow?”

Percy refocuses back on the sky to see that, well, yeah. There’s a rainbow. And not just any old rainbow. “That’s... a double rainbow?”

“Huh,” Apollo lets out. “Must be an oil spill nearby.”

Or a good sign, Percy thinks, biting his lip, deciding not to say anything. Knowing his luck, he would just jinx himself.

But even then... he has a good feeling about this.

10. Chapter 10

Notes for the Chapter:

hi i got carried away with the smut.

this is 16 pages.

do not. expect another 16 pages next chapter pls lmao i will die.

enjoy <3

They get in the car still dripping wet, pants back on, and back on the road like nothing happened. Apollo considers drying them, but then he looks at Percy's wet hair, dark as Nyx herself, and decides against it. The atmosphere is pleasant and quiet, not filled with disbelief or regret, and Percy's smile feels permanent and real, happy and satisfied.

"Want any bubblegum?" Apollo asks, digging into the pocket of his jeans and pulling out his last piece. "I don't share my bubblegum with just anyone, I'll have you know."

Percy snorts and takes it, but doesn't actually eat it. "Oh, I'm *sure* I'm special, don't worry."

Apollo whistles, winking at him. "You think I'd let anyone *but* Percy Jackson tell me to wait three months to take him on a date? Anyone can suck my dick, but a *date*? You haven't the faintest idea how special you are."

"Really?" Percy asks, blushing, but there's a twinkle to his eyes that Apollo catches when he shifts his gaze towards him, mischief and recklessness coming up to the surface so beautifully it takes his breath away. "Can I suck your dick, then?"

Apollo almost drives them off the road with that, but he manages to hold himself back, nodding with enthusiasm. "Oh, fuck, yeah. Any day, any

time, baby, seriously—”

Percy reaches over and sets a hand on his thigh. Apollo freezes. Swallows. Oh. *Oh fuck*, Percy will be the end of him, won't he? He can tell. He was already obsessed and now he's absolutely fucking thrilled, losing his mind, not even sparing a thought to Annabeth because fuck her for not properly appreciating what she had.

“Any time,” Percy repeats, and Apollo sneaks another look off the road at him, seeing his thoughtful expression. He's staring at his hand on Apollo's thigh like he's actually considering this madness, this crazy energy between the two of them, and Apollo couldn't be more tense, tightening his grip around the steering wheel. “You sure?”

“Absolutely,” Apollo says, because why lie? He's always been one to say yes to some outlandish ideas. After all, Taylor Swift had an emo goth phase, and that went *amazing*. This is a walk in the park, since he's done it before, but it being Percy makes it... so much more. It makes him nervous and turned on, has him holding his breath. “Whatever you want, Percy.”

“I've never done this before,” Percy sighs, licking his lips. His skin is already flushing, and Apollo almost groans at how pink his lips still are from the kisses they shared. He didn't think Percy would want to do more with him while on this trip, not at all— three months is three months, and a blink of an eye for a god, so this is overwhelming in at least ten types of ways, and they're all good. “Kinda wanna, though.”

“I won't stop you,” Apollo raises an eyebrow at him, and Percy blushes even darker. “I promise we'll be safe. I could park if you want me to, though.”

“No,” Percy says, too fast. Apollo resists the urge to close his eyes and count to ten because if Percy keeps being like this, forever, well— he doesn't think he's ever going to be done with him, and vice versa. “So this is... okay?”

Apollo does the least rational thing and takes a hand off the steering wheel to take hold of Percy's and press it right up against his cock, where he's

already hardening just from the idea, the interaction, the way Percy's body seems to be thrumming with the energy and need to do this, considering how he keeps wiggling his leg.

He hears him swallow, heavy, and then let out a sigh, fingers twitching before pressing in against his rapidly rising arousal. Apollo barely holds back a smirk. "What do you think?"

"Okay," Percy lets out, his voice weak, and then actually moves his other hand to his crotch, moving Apollo's out of the way, and undoing his pants' button. He squeezes the steering wheel so hard he almost bends it, and has to force himself to relax as his zipper comes down. "Okay. Fuck. Fuck, this is so hot."

Apollo laughs. "Who do you think you're riding with?"

Percy lets out a little laugh, as well, but then he actually dives into Apollo's pants and all the amusement is sucked from the air, his hand determinately wrapping around his cock in order to pull it out of his pants and underwear. Honestly, Apollo's starting to think there's no use in being clothed around Percy now. Somehow, one of them has almost always divested of their garments when they're together. Apollo decides to call that a cosmic signal for them to fuck, and he'll gladly take it.

He curses under his breath when Percy bends over, a hand grabbing the seat while the other guides his cock inside his mouth. He goes slow, probably more out of nerves because this is his first time rather than anything else, but the brush of his breath against the head of his dick and the way he lays a kiss on it, with those soft, plush lips of his... gods, Apollo wants to take a hand off the steering wheel and push his head down, but he supposes that can wait a little more.

When Percy finally opens his mouth to take him in, Apollo has to force himself to keep his eyes open, groaning. It's warm and wet, and Percy's exploratory hesitance, doing an experimental suck and licking the head before trying to take more of him in, makes it intense, explosive, and deliciously intimate.

“That’s right, baby,” Apollo lets out, trying to encourage him, swallowing. Percy hums and *gods*, that’s killing him. He will kill him. “Fuck, you’re going to drive me crazy. Can you take more, honey?”

Percy complies, then pulls back when he gets short of breath, licking his hand to pump his cock once. Apollo curses again, and regrets not being able to see his face, eyes fixated on the road. When Percy comes back down, he takes him even deeper, and Apollo almost misses a turn because of it. Fuck, he’s going to make Percy a star at sucking cock one day, for sure, and repeat this experience in the sun chariot just to show him the real pleasures of being with him.

“Gods, I’m obsessed with you,” Apollo pants out, blinking hard, as Percy bobs his head up and down, making slurping sounds, drool already dripping from his lips’ corners. He swallows, sucks him hard, and Apollo finally brings his hand down and pushes him down, forcing him to take more than he has figured out how to, a shiver going through his body as he hears Percy choke. “Fuck, that’s it. You like that, baby?”

Judging by how Percy makes absolutely no effort to move or struggle, his throat constricting around his cock in a way that makes Apollo rock his hips as much as he can into it, he seems just fine with it. But he won’t take any chances, so he pulls Percy’s hair until he’s free, coughing a little, panting, letting out a little moan. Apollo looks down at him to see him licking his lips, cleaning up a trail of saliva that connects in a lovely manner to his cock, then snaps his eyes back at the road.

“All good?” He asks, only for Percy to moan again, nodding. Apollo pulls his hair again, and notices the little whine it earns him. He adds it to the list of ways to ruin Percy much later on. “Verbalize it, Percy. All good, yes or no?”

“Yes,” Percy groans out. Apollo looks at his face and finds wide eyes, red lips, a crimson flush on his cheeks. Gods. What a work of art. “Am I doing good?”

Apollo’s brain short-circuits and when it comes back online he’s miraculously not crashed the car, but his cock throbs and he feels the

precum coming out of his his tip faster, because the idea of Percy being *this* kind of lover— one that takes pleasure *so, so well* and wants to give it back just as good, while acting so very submissive... shit.

“You’re doing fantastic,” Apollo rasps out, his mouth dry. He pushes Percy’s head down in a daze, making an extra effort to read road signs just in case, groaning when Percy attempts to deep throat him and ends up choking again. “*Fuck*, you’re doing so good, baby. Are you gonna make me cum? Swallow it all up?”

Percy lets out a desperate noise and Apollo checks another item off his list, *cumslut*. He thanks all his lucky stars because this is starting to feel like a wild fantasy come true and he couldn’t be more ecstatic about it.

He caresses Percy’s hair as he keeps blowing him, willingly choking and panting for more every time he needs to take a breath. He sneaks a hand down the back of his neck, feeling his skin, the goosebumps and shivers, then further down to feel the way the muscles of his shoulders shift every time he bobs his head, pressing in with his nails.

Gods, he wishes he could get Percy off from here, or make him get off, but the idea of leaving him hanging, wanting Apollo’s touch on him... yes. Oh, yes, that sounds lovely. That sounds like enough to drive the both of them mad, because he wants to touch him, but Apollo is almost as much of a masochist as he is a sadist. He can wait. But he wants to see how long Percy lasts before he breaks.

Yeah, he needed to get laid. Call it a win-win.

He cums to the thought of Percy spreading his legs for him, somewhere down the line, and to the feeling of Percy’s throat swallowing around him. He’s good and tries to keep his cum in his mouth but some spills out, escaping from the corners of his lips, proving too much of a difficult thing for Percy to get right on his first try. It doesn’t matter, since it gives him the sight of Percy’s mouth covered in streaks of white, of watching him lick his lips and his hand clean.

Percy makes eye contact, panting as hard as Apollo is, and shoots him an embarrassed, innocent little smile. Apollo almost has an aneurysm. “Eyes on the road, dude.”

Apollo decides hearing the word dude after getting sucked off is fucking illegal. He glares at the road as Percy tucks him back in his pants. “How are your pants feeling, darling?”

“Tight,” Percy answers, with no hesitation. “Uh, should I—?”

“No,” Apollo snaps. “I’ll do it myself. You’re gonna sit tight, look pretty, and man the radio. Got it, baby?”

Percy lets out a shuddering breath, voice weak. “Okay.”

Next order of business: food. It’s hard for Apollo to focus on his mental road map after getting his brains sucked out through his dick, but he manages to drive them into a medium-sized town, and parks them in a Hooters.

Percy stares. “This is... a joke?”

“Food’s good, c’mon,” Apollo laughs, lowering the sunshade to look into the mirror there to make sure he looks at least *presentable*. Then he looks at Percy and considers his swollen lips and messed up hair, and both their wet clothes. “Yeah, we’re good. Are you cool with eating here?”

“Annabeth didn’t like Hooters,” Percy says, and Apollo wonders if blind rage is really as bad as they say. But he takes a deep breath, and decides not to find out. “Let’s go, maybe you can post this on Instagram too.”

Apollo’s eyes zero-in on the huge hickey blossoming on the side of Percy’s neck and raises his eyebrows. “Absolutely, gorgeous.”

The waitresses at this particular establishment all know him by name. They all smile and wave at him as they go in and are guided to their table; some flirt with him and he flirts back and Apollo catches Percy’s nose adorably wrinkling with jealousy, so he does the natural thing and wraps an arm

around his shoulders, making him sit down next to him instead of across him.

“Are you ready to order?” One of the waitresses, Ana, asks, smiling brightly at him. She has pink hair and brown skin and gorgeous blue eyes, one of which she winks at Apollo when she realizes how they’re sitting. “Aw, Apollo, you’ve forgotten all about us already?”

Percy takes a deep breath next to him and Apollo smirks. “Never, I’ll keep leaving reviews until this is the best Hooters in the country, sweetheart. It’ll make your boss give you a raise. Now, in regards to the food—”

“The usual?” Ana asks, already writing it down in her notepad. “We got the best picked out just for you, honey, the chef is very happy to serve.”

“Go right ahead and add my dessert order to that,” Apollo glances at Percy, who is visibly pouting. “Check back on us in a couple minutes, will you? Promise you won’t miss me.”

Ana lets out a laugh. “Charming as ever. Call for me when you’re ready!”

They watch her walk away and if possible, Percy pouts even harder. Apollo leans in to whisper in his ear. “Hm, green looks great on you.”

“Shut up,” Percy laughs, shaking his head as he checks the menu. “You wouldn’t like it if you were me, either.”

“That is correct,” Apollo nods, and grabs Percy’s chin. He shouldn’t, he knows, because they aren’t dating and aren’t going to be considering dating for a while, but he can’t resist kissing his lips, chaste and sweet, slow and intimate. Percy looks like one of his sacred cows when he draws back, and it makes it all worth it. “So. Want a burger?”

They end up having more food than their table for two can handle. Percy can truly be an eating machine when he wants to be and perhaps Apollo shouldn’t be surprised; he can’t imagine how many calories he burns being that pretty on the daily. Sitting there. Looking like the father of several of his future children.

Oh wow slow down, his brain chastises, and Apollo decidedly ignores it in order to take as many pictures of Percy as possible. He helps him set up his new phone as they eat, reading off numbers of people they both know that he doesn't have memorized, and more than once leans into his space and kisses him mid-sentence because he's had a taste of Percy Jackson and now he can't stop.

When they get back to the car, they decide to go shopping and get Percy a decent amount of clothes for the duration of their road trip, which Apollo approximates to another day or two still, considering the backtracking and all the stops they keep taking. He loves the idea of spending this much time with Percy, yet dreads the arrival to New York, because he knows Annabeth Chase will not let herself be broken up with. He's met this type of girl before; they think that their boyfriends have no right to break up with them, think that if the relationship is over it's only because they say so.

It's a shame, really. She'll remain delusional, not realizing she can do better than a relationship that's already dead and gone and buried. Percy's lack of reluctance to let Apollo touch him and taste him is proof enough that the love they have left for each other isn't romantic and nowhere near healthy. No, that love is the result of habit. It's the mourning of losing something you thought was permanent, like Annabeth's monuments in Olympus.

Percy will be fine. He's ever-changing. Adaptable. Optimistic underneath the realistic approach he takes to his life. Apollo doesn't think Annabeth Chase will be able to say that she's good, with full honesty, for a long, long time.

Good riddance. Apollo has no pity for jailers. And he *loves* a petty vendetta.

It's what makes him take more pictures of Percy as he drives, sunglasses on his nose, his fancy button-up now open over a green shirt Apollo picked for him that makes his eyes pop. The hickey on his neck is on full display, dark purple and a stark contrast against his tanned skin, and his lips look just-kissed, because they spent around an hour making out before starting the drive out of the town.

He doesn't care what people see and neither does Percy, because when he tries asking for permission to post the pictures he just shrugs. "Just make sure they're worth it. Also, I wouldn't want to mess up your aesthetic, so —"

"You're Percy Jackson," Apollo snorts, squeezing his thigh, watching him swallow because he's been caressing it ever since he started driving, higher and higher. He won't touch him until their next stop, because recently-taught Percy driving an automatic is a little too much road risk, but it's ever-present. He won't let him forget about their unfinished business from earlier. "You fit in perfectly with me."

Percy blushes crimson, and Apollo snaps a picture of that too. "Gods, you don't just say things like that."

"Funny," Apollo grins. "I just did."

"I—" Percy starts, shaking his head with a smile, and then just shrugs. "Is it weird that I don't... feel guilty anymore? Or, just, bad? Like I'm just..."

"Angry," Apollo nods, his smile widening. "I love anger— don't take this the wrong way, but yours is long overdue. If you already went through grief and heartbreak... it's time for you to reclaim your dignity and get angry."

Percy hums, letting out a deep breath. "Okay. Does horny enter this category?"

"With me around?" Apollo winks, leaning back against his seat as he moves his hand higher on Percy's thigh, deeper between his legs. They tense up under his touch, and he squeezes, listening to Percy's breath and heartbeat spike. "Always."

That night, after an afternoon of singing along to the radio together—and Percy proves to have a *beautiful* voice—they book a hotel room, tired and hopelessly wrapped around each other. Up the elevator, Apollo presses Percy against the wall and kisses him, slow and sensual, bodies pressed together and letting his hands wander until he's shaking, nerves frayed.

The only reason they don't completely forget to step out of the elevator is because someone on their floor is going down and they clear their throat at the sight of them tangled together.

But once they're in the room, baggage forgotten on the floor and door locked, Apollo looks at Percy and bites his lip. "Are you sure about this?"

Percy looks up from where he's removing his dress shirt and slipping out of his shoes, surprised. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"I hate to be the nice guy," Apollo frowns, nervously fidgeting with his car keys. "But are you emotionally... ready for a one-night-stand that isn't a one-night-stand? You know, it's kinda different from car head. And a handjob. And thigh fucking."

"Oh," Percy blushes a lovely deep red that makes it twice as hard not to push him against the wall and kiss him. He stands with only one sock on and lets his dress shirt fall to the floor, pouting slightly. "Yeah, I think so. Honestly, I... I can't help but think that maybe I've been waiting for an excuse to leave for a while. To walk away from her. It's... it's like we haven't actually been together in months. Years, even."

"Like a parasite that you don't realize is killing you until it's too late, yet only requires a simple clinical removal," Apollo says, feeling his frown deepen, and Percy raises his eyebrows at the anger in his voice but nods. Apollo sighs. "I'm sorry. I just want to make sure I'm not... messing things up for you even more."

"Hey," Percy shrugs, shooting him a tentative smile. "I want this, okay? It feels right. But we can just sleep if you'd rather do that instead."

Apollo sits down on the bed, leaving the keys on the nightstand, and pats his lap. He sees Percy swallow. "Come here."

Percy walks over like he just got charmspoken, his mouth parted and his pupils wide, threatening to swallow the green of his eyes. He doesn't hesitate as he hikes a leg over Apollo's legs in order to be able to sit on his lap, with his knees to each side of his waist. Apollo's hands are instantly on

him, grabbing under his thighs to pull him closer, as flushed together as possible.

“Now, Percy,” Apollo whispers, pressing his lips against his ear. “Is this enough of an answer?”

“Yes,” Percy breathes out fast, hands coming up to Apollo’s hair, fingers tangling in it. “I’ve never wanted anyone like this before.”

Apollo tries not to let his ego inflate too much at that, but it’s hard. Some of it slips out. “Never wanted a cock down your throat like you wanted mine, hm? You looked so desperate, choking on it. Like you were born for it.”

Percy’s shudder is so strong that Apollo feels it, and it makes him feel even higher on him. All he sees and breathes is Percy, all he feels is him. As if answering to his thoughts, Percy presses himself closer, until Apollo can feel where he’s already stirring in his pants, against his belly. It’s intoxicating.

“It felt so good. *I* felt so good,” Percy confesses, his voice tight, his body tense. Apollo squeezes his thighs and then traces his hands up his body, over his belly and his chest, his sides, his back, feeling him tremble until his skin breaks out in goosebumps. His hands land on each side of his neck, and he presses a thumb against his pulse, feeling it flutter, rabbiting. He feels Percy swallow again. “I didn’t know it could feel like that.”

“I can make it even better,” Apollo promises, because why lie? It’s the truth. If what they’ve done felt good then spending a whole night with him in bed should leave Percy ridiculously obsessed, and hung up on him. He quite likes the idea, probably more than he should, but he can’t help being greedy. “Do you want me to kiss you, baby?”

Percy doesn’t bother saying yes or no, despite Apollo’s early insistence that he always should. He decides to let it slide for now, because instead of answering Percy just turns his head and presses their lips together, his tongue clumsily coming out to play because gods, he doesn’t seem to have been properly romanced *ever*, and he’d hate to refuse to read such an eager physical cue.

Desire coils Percy's body so tight that Apollo can feel it in each slide of their lips, in each panting breath. He decides that it's his job to undo all of that tension; sex should be fun. Sex should bring joy. Sex should make you lose your inhibitions and fears as long as you're with the right partner. So that only the physical exchange and your feelings can speak without words. It's the same thing as dancing, in a way.

He's so furious at Annabeth for ruining this for him. For giving Percy such a skewed view of it; he can't help but want to repair that. Erase her touch on his skin from existence. If skinny dipping at the Great Salt Lake served to purify Percy's emotions, and the rain afterwards to cleanse his spirits, then this, right here, is lustrating his body. He's never had a higher honor.

He trails his hands down Percy's body again and makes sure to remove that lingering sock on his foot, to rid him of his shirt, to unbutton his pants. Percy's breath is loud in the silence of the room and Apollo is nowhere near immune to this. No, he's just as overwhelmed, just as worked up, but he's going to do this right. He's going to be thorough.

"Apollo," Percy breathes against his ear, shivering as he puts some space between their bodies so he can help him out of his pants, and out of his underwear, too. Percy blushes everywhere despite his naturally sun-kissed skin; there's red on his shoulders and his chest and of course, his cock is flushed. It makes him want to wrap him up in a bow and give him as a gift — to himself, of course. Nothing wrong with self-love. "Apollo, will you —? Can you, I, can you touch me? Please?"

Gods, he's adorable. "You sound so sweet like this, though. Maybe I'd like to hear more of it."

Percy's grip on his hair becomes painful, just the way he likes it. His voice is practically a whine. "*Please?* I've been thinking about this all day, please, I want you, want you so bad, you feel so good—"

Ah, fuck. Percy knows where to hit. He supposes that's fair, but Apollo can't help but be amused at his own weakness. He presses his lips to the corner of Percy's mouth and then down his jaw, to his neck, bites and sucks

the hickey he left there earlier to make sure it won't fade any time soon. It earns him Percy eagerly rocking his hips forwards.

"Is this not what you meant?" He asks, playing innocent, and unexpectedly, Percy pulls his head back by his hair and brings him in for a messy, wet kiss. Hot and desperate as he keeps grinding his hips against him, trying to find any friction. Apollo lets out a low grunt, grabs him by the thighs again and turns them.

He lets Percy fall rather roughly against the mattress and doesn't give him a second to catch his breath before he's pulling him in by the ankles as he kneels over him, hooking them around his waist. Percy stares at him with wide eyes and messy hair and an open mouth, and it's a sight worthy of worship.

Good. He intends to do so.

"I love this energy," Apollo says out loud, leaning down, kissing Percy's forehead. He presses his crotch flush against Percy's and thrusts against him once, a thrill washing through his body when Percy moans, hands sliding under Apollo's shirt to dig his nails into his back. "Yes, wonderful energy."

"Please," Percy says again; Apollo fears developing an obsession with hearing him beg. "Please, Apollo, your clothes—"

He lets Percy take off his shirt, but stops his hands when they go near his pants to do it himself. The second his cock is out Percy moans even though he's not even touching him, and a wave of heat and desire hits him so hard that for a blind moment he considers turning Percy onto his knees and taking him from behind until he pleads for mercy.

Apollo takes a deep breath. Maybe one day. Today, he wants to see his face.

He keeps it simple; leans down to cover Percy's body with his own and wraps his hand around both their cocks, squeezing and pumping at a rhythm, thrusting his hips just-so, so that Percy can enjoy all the wonderful feelings one-by-one, slowly, pleasure creeping up on him.

“Fuck,” Percy moans, furrowing his eyebrows, hips twitching upwards to try and match his pace. He’s leaking so much precum that lube would be excessive, and biting his lips red enough that Apollo just leans in and does it for him until he can taste copper on his tongue. Percy lets out a whimper, licking his blood off Apollo’s lips when he pulls back. “Fuck, fuck, so good, good, love it—”

Apollo presses their foreheads together, panting, moving his hips and his hands a little faster. Percy whines as he closes his eyes and squeezes them tighter; fuck, he can almost imagine what it’d be like to properly fuck him, slide into him, show him the wonders he can pull off with his cock, but he fears coming off too strong, leaving nothing to Percy’s imagination.

Still, he can’t hold the words back. “Fuck, I wanna be inside you.”

Percy freezes. So does Apollo. For a second panic fills him; he doesn’t want to screw this up, push him too far, because he knows Percy deserves the best of the best, to enjoy every single second, every single feeling. He’s been pushed enough.

But then Percy digs his nails into his back and lets out a deep breath. “You can be.”

Apollo almost has a heart attack. He leans back and opens his eyes to look at his face. “What?”

Percy licks his lips, blood traces on the skin around his mouth, as he makes eye contact with him. “Want you to fuck me.”

“Holy shit,” Apollo lets out, groaning, kissing Percy again and rotating his hips to hear the way his breath catches. He bites him once more, hungry, wanting, until blood spills again and it somehow only seems to make both of them hornier; Percy bites back, but Apollo doesn’t feel like letting him burn his tongue with ichor, so he pulls back. “Holy *shit*, are you sure?”

“Yeah,” Percy nods, tilting his hips up. He blushes even deeper. “You—your dick. It felt good in my mouth. Big, warm, I, *gods*, I wanna know what it feels like down there.”

Apollo feels like Percy is tearing his will apart with every word. “Have you ever been fucked before?”

“No,” Percy sighs, licking his lips again. His mouth looks red and it’s all Apollo can see. “Never. Never wanted to be. Now I do. I— fuck, it’s turning me on so much. You’re so hot. I wanna know what it’s like.”

Apollo can’t help it. “Want me to fill you up nice, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Percy hisses, closing his eyes, throwing his head back. There’s a curl of embarrassment to the corner of his mouth but his arousal has overpowered it and Apollo’s so, so glad. So taken apart by this. “Fuck, yeah. Please. I’ll do whatever you want.”

“Fuck,” Apollo breathes out. “Fuck, okay. We don’t have lube. Gonna have to eat you out.”

Percy opens his eyes wide. “Down there? Your mouth?”

“Yes,” Apollo raises his eyebrows. He has to physically stop himself from just twisting Percy’s body around to do it, because he knows not everyone likes it. But he loves it. There’s little that he doesn’t. “Unless you don’t want me to?”

“Can’t you magic the lube or something?” Percy asks, which is a completely reasonable question, logical even, a wonderful solution, but disappointment fills his chest and it must show. Percy’s mouth drops open. “Oh. But *you* want to.”

Apollo licks his lips. His mouth is watering. “I might have fantasized about it. Once or thrice. Or thirteen times. I might have been looking too closely at your thighs during your swim meets.”

Percy’s laugh fills his ears, and it’s just *wonderful*. Other-worldly. He’s never heard anything more beautiful. “Okay, I— we can try, I guess.”

“You can say no,” Apollo reminds him, because he’s so, so scared of Percy *literally* giving him what he wants with no personal regard. Percy’s eyes go

soft at that, his smile tender. “Always remember that. I won’t get mad. We can just do something else. I *can* magic the lube.”

“I want to try,” Percy’s smile widens, and he runs a hand through Apollo’s hair. “I’ll tell you if I don’t like it.”

“Hm,” Apollo hums, skeptical, but he can’t be a hypocrite and ignore a yes, either. Percy seems into it. Curious. Willing. Honest. Fuck. “Shit, okay. Okay, let me just...”

He untangles himself from Percy, stands, and then sinks to his knees on the floor. Percy’s mouth drops open and Apollo must admit that this position is quite reverent, with Percy sitting higher than he is, but he loves it. It’s perfect.

He brings Percy in by his thighs, but leans up to kiss his chest, playfully nibble on a nipple and bite hickeys all over the skin of his front, until Percy’s arching against the bed with his hands and struggling to keep his moans in, biting his lip.

Apollo licks his cock from base to tip and sucks the head, but doesn’t linger. He makes Percy lay down, resting his legs on his shoulders while he spreads them open and Apollo almost makes an embarrassing sound at the sight of his rim, knowing no one has ever touched it before, knowing he’ll be the first.

Knowing he’ll ruin Percy for anyone else.

He leans in and licks with no hesitation, feeling Percy twitch and tense up. Apollo brings a hand and wraps it around his cock until he relaxes, pumping him slowly and softly, caressing his thigh with his other hand before trying again, slowly, making sure to leave the skin wet first-thing.

The distraction is effective and Percy does nothing other than twitch, which is when Apollo presses his tongue, a little tease before pulling back. He does it as many times as is necessary until he’s able to truly slip in, deep, deep, until he can’t fit more and he can feel the clench of Percy’s ass around his tongue.

It is heaven. He stops jerking him off. He takes the fact that Percy hasn't kicked him away as a good sign and continues, pulling in and out, in and out until he feels it safe to push his tongue inside and suck with his mouth and twist it.

Percy moans and it washes over him like victory. With his now free hand he decides to go in, sucking his finger and then pushing it inside, almost to the third knuckle before he feels any resistance. He pushes out, goes in with his tongue again, and this is how he takes Percy apart.

Finger by finger, he alternates, until all that reaches his ears is a chorus of moans, rising in volume, and Percy starts asking for more and more and more, and who is he to deny him? By the time he's three fingers deep Percy's rocking his hips back and crying out, his body taut.

Apollo decides it's enough.

The second he stands, Percy's wrapping his jelly legs around him, or at least attempting to, breathing hard, looking desperate. His cock is a drooling mess of precum over his belly and he's never been more enchanted by anything before.

"Please," Percy says. It's becoming his favorite word. "Apollo. *Please.*"

He kneels on the bed and licks his lips, helping Percy rest back against the pillows. He steals one and makes him lift his body, setting it underneath his tailbone. It requires him to be between Percy's legs and he seemingly has decided to shed any shame because he's trying to pull him in with them again, the soles of his feet digging into Apollo's back.

"Baby," Apollo laughs, and leans over to kiss him, sweet and short. Percy tightens his legs around him, nails digging into his back, and it's the most attractive thing he's ever done. "Relax. I'll be inside you in no time."

"You relax," Percy snaps back, glaring at him, but Apollo as much as runs a hand over his chest and pinches a nipple and the look is gone, replaced with wide eyes again. "*Please*, fuck me. I'll beg. I'll cry. I'll sing if you want me to, holy shit—"

“I did not know Percy Jackson could be this needy,” Apollo chuckles, charmed and turned on beyond belief. Percy is red all over but doesn’t seem to be sorry about his behavior which is ideal. Apollo winks. “I love it. But, Percy— this might hurt a bit, okay? I need you to be relaxed and ready for me and tell me if there’s anything wrong at any point.”

Percy blinks up at him, chest heaving, and closes his eyes. “Okay. I trust you.”

Apollo could weep. In fact, he feels something soft and old dislodging in his heart, that makes him want to shower Percy in gold and flowers and all oceanic views he could ever need or want for. But that kind of softness should be set aside, reserved for another time, when Percy’s mind and heart are crystal clear.

If he still wants him after that, then, well. Apollo has always been good at courting boys.

He cheats and magics some lube for his cock, because he wants this to go as smoothly as possible, for Percy to feel as little discomfort as there could be. He leans over him, on his elbow, looking at his face as Percy’s legs adjust properly around his waist, then presses a kiss against the shell of his ear when he grabs his cock and presses in, a soft kiss over his rim.

Percy’s breath catches. He mumbles, “*hot.*”

Apollo hums, looking at his swollen, bitten lips, and presses in a little more. Percy’s mouth drops open at the stretch but to Apollo’s delight he remains relaxed, clearly having taken his words seriously. Nails dig into his skin so hard it’d break if he were mortal and Percy whines, tensing up once the head is in, chest heaving. Apollo stops.

“Deep breath,” Apollo says against his ear, and uses his hand to caress Percy’s thigh before moving up to wrap around his dick. Percy shivers as he gently jerks him off, relaxing again, and then Apollo pulls his hips back then in, deeper, and revels in the choked off moan Percy lets out. “There you go. You like that, honey?”

“More,” Percy chokes out, gasping as Apollo gives it to him, moving in slowly. One of Percy’s hands trails down his back all the way to the small of his back and presses in along with the sole of his feet, encouraging him. Apollo hisses as he slides even deeper because of it and closes his eyes, moaning against Percy’s ear, and he hears him let out a pleased sigh. “Bastard. Make that sound again. Fuck me.”

Apollo laughs. “You have absolutely no idea how much I’m holding back—otherwise I’d be fucking you into next year.”

“Then stop,” Percy moans out, because Apollo pulls back again then presses in. Gods, he’s so tight and warm and perfect. His cock is throbbing inside Percy and all he wants is fuck him until it’s loose, until he’d be able to slip in easily, until it’s sloppy and wet. “Fuck me like you mean it, Apollo. Please. Please. Promise I won’t break.”

“Does it hurt?” Apollo asks, his voice tight, pressing his face to the side of Percy’s neck. “Like at all?”

“No,” Percy rocks his hips up and presses him down with his feet and fuck, fuck, he’s giving in. He can’t do this. He feels so good, Apollo wants to stay buried in him forever. “Do it, do it, please, Apollo, want you, you’re so good—”

He pushes the rest of the way in with one smooth motion, and back out immediately; Percy’s body coils with tension that immediately fades away and lets him in, gasping, letting out a curse and a small, breathless yes, *finally, yeah* that has Apollo growling low in his throat.

He does it again, fucking inside him with no holds barred, as fast and as deep as he can. Percy comes loose under him, his voice ringing out, stretching into long moans and calls of his name and little whines, whimpers that sneak under Apollo’s skin and turn the heat in his belly into a wildfire.

He straightens up onto his knees and brings Percy up higher for better leverage, and it’s then that he finds the angle that hits Percy’s prostate head on, hard, fast, unrelenting as skin slaps against skin with every thrust.

“Oh *fuck*,” Percy says, holding his arms up to hold on to the bars of the headboard, moaning every time a thrust rattles him, pushes him up the bed until Apollo brings him back down on his cock with his grip on his thighs. “Oh shit, shit, oh my *god*, holy shit—”

“My name,” Apollo demands, squeezing Percy’s thighs so hard he’s sure they’ll bruise. They make eye contact and Percy swallows, panting, licking his lips. Apollo watches his eyes roll up at another well-aimed thrust and memorizes the full-body twitch that comes with it. “Fuck, wish you could see yourself, taking my cock so well. You love it, don’t you?”

“*Yeah*,” Percy nods, his eyes losing focus as he throws his head back. Apollo bends and kisses his neck, opposite of the hickey, to leave a new one. Paint his throat blue and purple for everyone to see. “Fuck, yeah, Apollo, I’m so full, so full, *ah*, shit, feels good, mh—”

Apollo kisses his lips and wraps a hand around his throat, squeezing lightly. Percy clenches down on his cock and lets out a high-pitched moan, broken, loud, and he squeezes a little harder to hear him choke, feeling a new wave of arousal washing over his body.

“I knew it,” Apollo chuckles, while Percy does nothing other than move his hips back into Apollo’s thrusts, not even grabbing his wrist. The show of trust is there and this is something Apollo would usually talk about beforehand with a lover, but Percy reminds him of how very Greek he is, the most of all the gods, and he makes him want to *take*. “Fuck, you’re fucking *perfect*.”

It just so happens that something in Percy answers to that need of his, and he’ll apologize later. For now, he loves hearing the struggle in Percy’s airways, the way any breath he has left escapes him with every motion of his hips, with every slam of his cock on his prostate.

“Gods, I hope tonight haunts you,” Apollo confesses, moaning, squeezing around Percy’s throat one last time before letting him go, free to hear him take in a huge breath, to feel him clench down on his cock again. He wraps that hand around his cock now and pumps him and Percy’s body starts coiling, as he whimpers and moans, eyes shut tightly. “Fuck, you won’t be

able to think about anything other than me for months. When I take you out on that date I'll make it so nice for you, Percy. You deserve everything. And then I'll have you choking on my cock again. Make you beg for it. Would you like that?"

Percy nods and moans and shivers and Apollo realizes that his mind has gone on vacation, too lost in pleasure. He smirks and kisses him, hard, bites his lips again even though they've already bled plenty, and shifts to grab his ass with both hands and spread him further, fucking into him even deeper, even harder.

The scream catches him off guard, but it only encourages him as Percy wraps himself around him so tight, legs and arms bringing him in, body moving in tandem with his as his orgasm washes over him. It's delicious and Percy cries so beautifully, clenches down and remains tight in a way that has Apollo going over the edge, as well, burying his face against Percy's neck and letting out his own melody of moans.

Then they go boneless against each other. Apollo can barely think through the daze of the afterglow and it is Percy that moves first, kissing him, hugging him, tears spilling down his cheeks that Apollo kisses in order to clean up, feeling immensely pleased with himself.

"Apollo," Percy says, his voice broken. He sounds like he just spent an entire hour screaming; he hopes the whole hotel heard him cum. It'd be ideal. "*Apollo.*"

"Give me one second and I'll clean up," Apollo requests, kissing his nose. He doesn't sound that good either. This is also ideal. "Fuck, I already want to fuck you again. Holy shit, you're wonderful."

"You—" Percy starts snapping, sounding incredulous. Then, all the fight leaves his body. "Shit. Shit. Fuck. Me too, actually. You're— gods. Gods, Apollo. You're gonna have to ask me out next month at this pace."

Apollo laughs, and finally slips out of Percy, watching him wince. Then he stares at his cum dripping out of Percy and sighs as arousal stirs in his belly

again. He looks at Percy, running a hand over his legs and seeing him shiver.

Hm. Perhaps tomorrow. "I'm not opposed to that. Want a bath or a shower?"

"Tomorrow," Percy scrunches up his nose, brings him close, and forces Apollo onto his side so he can cuddle into his chest. He sighs happily. "Sleep now. Don't care. Future-me issue."

It's official: Percy Jackson will be his cause of death. He's quite alright with that. "Okay. Hope you're ready for morning sex, then."

Percy is already snoring, so Apollo gets no response. This is quite alright; he brings the blankets over them and wraps Percy up nicely in them and in his arms, cuddling him good and proper and warm, holding him close. He sleeps curled in, taking up as little space as possible, and looking at him, absolutely boneless and passed out, all those sharp edges smoothed into vulnerability, Apollo feels that softness creep into his heart again.

And for the first time in a long time, he thinks he might be alright with it.

11. Chapter 11

Notes for the Chapter:

enjoy~

Percy wakes up to the infernal sound of a phone going off.

It's a default ringtone, the type that is obnoxious and loud and that you instantly change after first getting a call on your shiny new phone. It takes him about two rings to get angry at it and two more before realizing it's that no one's gonna answer so he's gonna have to move.

He lifts his head from where it's buried against his pillow and stretches his arm out to the nightstand to grab the phone. He has no idea why it's there but at least it's within reach; the second his fingers brush it he's able to drag it over and answer the phone call, putting it on speaker.

"Why?" He asks, closing his eyes as he rests his cheek against his pillow. His throat is dry and his mouth is parched and just saying that word hurts, his voice shredded to hell, but when he gets no response Percy's forced to groan and sigh before trying again. "Who is it?"

There comes a murmur from the phone, several voices, protests, noises, and then someone clears their throat. "Uh, *Percy*? It's Will. You know, Will Solace. You know, Nico's—"

"Dude," Percy rasps out. "I know who you are."

"Uh, right," Will takes a deep breath. "So, how's it going?"

Percy blinks at his phone. "Good, I guess. I'm in bed. How's it going for *you*? Did Nico jump off a cliff or something?"

"What? No," Will pauses, trying to control what seems to be... scandal, in his tone. "No, no, Nico's fine, he's right here, just, uh, I mean, you're in bed?"

“Yep,” Percy swallows, and realizes he’s hugging a pillow with an arm. He brings it closer against his chest and buries his face in it, catches a wisp of Apollo’s cologne. His spine tingles and he sighs. “In bed. You woke me up. Is this an emergency?”

“Not at all, just— did you and Annabeth break up?” Will rushes the question out almost like he’s being pressured to, and Percy frowns. “We—we heard some stuff. Just wanted to make sure no one was spreading, you know, nasty rumors.”

“We’re broken up,” Percy confirms, inhaling Apollo’s cologne again. Fuck. Memories of last night are starting to come back. He’s suddenly aware of how sore he is everywhere, from around his neck to his ass, and he shivers. Where he fuck is Apollo anyways? “Also she’ll probably deny we are. Don’t listen to her. I’m fine. I’m *fantastic*, actually.”

“Right,” Will audibly takes a deep breath, and more whispering voices come through the line. Weird. “Is— Percy, is dad with you?”

Percy pats the other side of the bed and pouts. “He’s not in bed right now, no. Don’t know where he went.”

“Oh my gods,” Will lets out, sounding genuinely panicked, and Percy just squints in confusion. The voices in the background rise in volume until Percy can clearly hear what sounds like Kayla going *Austin, you owe me two-hundred bucks!* and Nico’s laugh. “Oh my *gods*, Percy. Percy are you and my dad fu—”

Out of nowhere, a hand comes and snatches the phone from the bed, turning off the speaker so that he can’t hear the rest of Will’s words. Percy blinks innocently up at Apollo, who has a huge, self-satisfied smile on his face, and is holding a to-go tray from Starbucks, two drinks and a paper bag sitting on it.

“William,” Apollo goes, and Percy can hear what sounds like the whole of Cabin Seven exploding from the bed; Apollo actually winces and removes the phone from his ear for a second until they calm down. Then, he clears his throat. “Kids— yes, hi Nico, yeah I included you in this category, you’re

my in-law, but please, everyone. You're *my* children. If you're gonna gossip, do it right. Calling my phone is tacky. Love you. Bye!"

He hangs up the phone and drops it back on the nightstand, shooting Percy a brilliant smile. "Morning, gorgeous. Coffee?"

About three-hundred emotions fill his chest at once and it's so overwhelming that all Percy can do is turn on his back—which hurts like *shit*, holy fuck, his body is not happy—and make pathetic little grabby hands at him. Instead of giving him his face though, Apollo sits down on the bed and grabs one of the coffee cups, pushing it into his hand. Percy pouts.

"I got you a blonde roast," Apollo winks, a cocky edge to his smile. Percy blushes from his toes all the way up to his hair roots. "I know how much you like those."

Percy clears his throat. "Fuck you."

Apollo leans down and kisses him. Percy forgets what he was even pouting about as he kisses back, squeezing his coffee a little too hard until Apollo wraps a hand around the cup as well, chuckling against his lips.

"Let's not get a coffee burn this morning," Apollo mumbles, his smile flirty, and Percy's heart flutters dangerously. Fuck. "Are you sore?"

"Am I— am I *sore*?" Percy asks, incredulous, his voice breaking like he's going through puberty all over again. Apollo shrugs. "Am I *sore*? You—you *know* I'm sore. I'm fucked up. Everything hurts and I love it, you *bitch*."

Apollo laughs so hard he almost spills the coffee tray, and Percy tries to fight his smile but it's impossible; it stretches his lips anyways, and his breath is catching, hopeless as ever.

A vague memory of Apollo's words from last night hits him full force: *I hope this haunts you.*

Well. Mission accomplished.

As sore as he is, his body is full of energy just from being near him, and Percy licks his lips as he sits up, wincing, bringing his coffee up as he leans against the headboard. He can't help but let his eyes roam Apollo's body: his well-combed hair, fashionably wind-swept; the baby-blue button up shirt he's wearing with its sleeves rolled up to his forearms and the way it hugs his shoulders *just* the right way; his long, graceful musician and archer fingers wrapped so deliciously around his own coffee cup as he also takes a sip.

Gods, holy shit. Just looking at him is like looking at temptation and he can't help but think that maybe this is why everyone in Ancient Greece was so obsessed with him, why Rome ended up the way it was, the way it is now.

How could you look at Apollo and not want to bow? To worship?

Apollo notices him staring at him, and looks at him from under his eyelashes, fluttering them as he shoots him another flirty smile. He carefully glances down at his paper bag, raising an eyebrow. "I brought you brownies, baby."

Percy almost whimpers at the husk of his voice, just about managing to keep it in. His voice shakes. "I— thank you. Thank you. That's really sweet."

"Almost as sweet as you," Apollo nods, and Percy internally swoons. Apollo reaches over and nudges his jaw until Percy closes his mouth. "Don't wanna let the flies in."

"Right," Percy swallows, licking his lips. Apollo doesn't even try to pretend not to stare. He takes a deep breath, trying to be casual. "So, uh, I remember something about morning sex?"

Apollo chokes on his coffee, spilling a little on his front. "*That's* what you're worried about right now?"

“Yeah,” Percy says with full honesty. “What else am I supposed to think about?”

It's a genuine question. He can't spare a single thought to Annabeth other than if she didn't think the phone call was enough of a break up then their eventual confrontation surely will be. He doesn't care what she or someone else might think about his endeavors with Apollo. He's just focused on what makes him feel good above all.

Apollo remains baffled. “I guess you truly had fun, if you're not running away.”

Percy raises an eyebrow. “And why would I run away?”

“Oh, you know,” Apollo grimaces. “I have a reputation.”

“Don't care,” Percy rolls his eyes. “Don't slut shame yourself. You're fine. Your dick is so good I want it back.”

Apollo throws his head back, laughing, and then shakes his head at Percy. “You're just *lovely*, aren't you?”

Percy shrugs. “Can we fuck now?”

“No,” Apollo shakes his head again. “I texted your mother about why you didn't call her and why your old number is currently unavailable. Our rendezvous sidetracked us from reality quite a bit.”

“Oh shit,” Percy opens and closes his mouth. “I totally forgot about that.”

“It's alright, she said you should just relax and enjoy your trip. Rest. Text her about your status at least every twelve hours,” Apollo smiles, wide and amused. “So, I'm following orders.”

Percy stares. “You know what's super relaxing? An orgasm—”

Apollo laughs, sharp and easy. “Percy, you need a bath. Come on, I'll set it up and call room service and you can have the most relaxing bath of your life. Sound good?”

“Will you be in the bath?” He asks, and Apollo shoots him an amused, exasperated look. Percy winks at him. “I had to ask.”

“It’ll be all about you, Percy,” Apollo reaches over and runs a hand through his hair, looking at him with fondness in his eyes. “Nothing else matters. Now, what’s your opinion on breakfast mimosas?”

He agrees to everything Apollo suggests. The big breakfast, the mimosas, the oils and bubbles and rose petals in the bath water and the shoulder massage. Percy becomes jelly and he’s never been happier about it; he hits the mimosas *hard* and by the time Apollo takes his hands off his skin, he feels like this has to be what Elysium is like. He is also most definitely drunk.

“Can I take a picture?” Apollo asks, pulling his phone from his pocket after washing and drying his hands. Percy hums and nods, raising his mimosa in a mock toast as a pose, looking at the camera. Apollo looks positively ecstatic about it. “Can I upload it?”

Percy thinks about it for all of three seconds. “Yeah, whatever. Are you coming in?”

Apollo blinks. “We already had this conversation. This is about *you*—”

“And I want you to get in the bath with me,” Percy pouts, and moves over to the edge of the tub to get within grabbing distance of Apollo’s hand, splashing water and bubbles everywhere. Apollo’s mouth drops open. “Wanna share with you. Feels nice here.”

“Percy, you’re a menace,” Apollo shakes his head, still trying to resist, but all Percy has to do is look up at him with hope in his eyes, squeezing his hand, and Apollo gives in. “Oh, Styx, fine, okay, I’m coming in, holy shit, you’re persuasive.”

Apollo gets naked right before his eyes and Percy knocks back what little there’s left of the mimosa in his wine glass, licking his lips as he shamelessly enjoys the view. He feels so loose, so relaxed, he doesn’t ever

want to have a single thought again, not one that doesn't involve Apollo's strong thighs and his pretty hair and the prize between his legs.

Percy's breath catches as he recalls last night again. Fuck, that was good. He's obsessed. He wants more and for once he doesn't have second thoughts about it; the second Apollo steps into the tub and sits down, splashing more water on the floor, Percy's sliding into his space and tangling his fingers in his hair, pulling him into a kiss.

Apollo immediately responds by pulling him into his lap which is all kinds of good, and then Percy gets to fully experience the feeling of Apollo's skin under his hands again. Wet, pulled taut with muscle, warm. He darts out with his teeth to catch Apollo's lip and it earns him a little groan, which sends a shiver through his body.

"Percy, baby," Apollo says, trailing kisses down his jaw, to his neck. "I have a feeling you didn't just invite me in for the company."

"No idea what you mean," Percy mumbles out, running his hands down Apollo's chest all the way to his crotch; Apollo doesn't stop him when he reaches his cock and takes him in a hand, already discovering him hardening up, moaning. "Shit, you're so hot."

In his drunken state, Percy has the wild idea that he can suck Apollo's dick underwater, but gets distracted by Apollo's hands running down Percy's back before they find their place groping his ass, trying to get him closer.

"Thanks," Apollo sighs, biting Percy's lip. It stings; his mouth is busted from all the kissing yesterday, but he doesn't mind it. In fact, he loves it, and loves even more how one of Apollo's hands slides its fingers between his ass cheeks, pressing right up against his rim. A fingertip slips right in and Apollo makes a pleased sound. "Gods, still loose. I really did a number on you. Wanna ride me, baby? Want me to fill you again?"

"Yes," Percy hisses, arching his back to push his ass back onto Apollo's fingers, the words hitting him like a heat wave. The water is so oily that it just makes it all easier; the first finger is inside him in a matter of seconds,

making a loud little whine escape his throat. “Ah, yeah, good, good, so good...”

“You’re amazing like this,” Apollo says against his skin, kissing his neck again. “Dreamy and light. I’m obsessed with it.”

“More,” Percy gasps out, moving his fist up and down Apollo’s cock, sloppy, probably awful because he’s drunk and distracted, but Apollo still moans, moving his finger in faster before venturing with the second one. “*Fuck yeah, gods, Apollo, so good.*”

“I’m turning you around, baby,” Apollo says against his skin, pulling his fingers out. Percy whines; he wants to stay like this, but Apollo shushes him. “We don’t have a lot of space here, sweetheart, and I wanna be so deep inside you, make it so good for you—”

Well, consider him convinced. Percy turns around, holding on to the edge of the tub with both hands and pushing his ass back against Apollo’s crotch, whining again as his cock presses against it. Apollo grabs his hips to keep him still, then puts his fingers back inside, three this time. They press deep, right up against his prostate and Percy lets out the longest moan of his life, bouncing his body up and down back on them.

Water splashes out of the tub again and Apollo laughs. “Eager for it, are we?”

Percy grunts, closing his eyes. “Please, Apollo, please, I’ll be so good, so good for you, I promise, please—”

“Fuck,” Apollo lets out, voice breathy, pulling his fingers out. “All you’re missing is calling me daddy with that tone, baby.”

A shiver runs down Percy's spine at the mere idea, but he’s not so far gone in pleasure to not be embarrassed. “Maybe... maybe in a year?”

Apollo groans like he’s torturing him, and Percy feels his cock press right up against his rim, which makes him not catch his next words at all. “Holy shit I’m going to be your baby daddy someday—”

Percy sinks down on his cock, leaning back, moaning over the words he's saying, completely deaf. He can only focus on the stretch, the girth, the feeling of being filled up and up. Apollo's hands dig into his hips, forcing him to slow down.

"Tight," he says, and it sounds like a warning, but for Percy it registers as a compliment and he tries to move, but Apollo holds him hard enough to bruise. "*Percy*, relax. Don't wanna hurt you, baby, c'mon."

He realizes that he's clenching down too much, too desperate, as Apollo runs a hand through his hair. It makes him aware of the pounding of his heart and the heat on his face. So he forces himself to relax, throwing his head back slightly to lean into Apollo's soothing touches, and his whole body tingles as Apollo's cock, still and big and hot, starts feeling like maddening temptation, even better than before.

"There we go," Apollo chuckles, leaning in to kiss his shoulder, and Percy eagerly nods at the praise, feeling floaty and good and like he needs to cum. Apollo pulls him up by the grip he has on him, and then down; Percy catches on and follows that rhythm by himself, steady and slow. Apollo moans and it's at least three types of perfect. "Fuck, you are so pretty like this, Percy, fucking yourself on my cock. So desperate for it, so perfect."

"*Yeah*," Percy nods, feeling his eyes roll up behind his eyelids, speeding up. "Yes, yeah, Apollo, so good, want you deeper, harder—"

Suddenly, Percy's pushed further against the edge of the tube, Apollo's cock slipping out of him, only for him to get on his knees behind him in the tub. He's barely processed the idea of getting fucked doggy-style in a bathtub when Apollo starts pushing inside him again, hard and fast, almost making him lose his grip on the tub and making him see stars.

Percy lets out the loudest, lewdest moan he's ever made in his life, high-pitched, desperate, *hungry*, even. Apollo growls in response to it and only then starts properly fucking him, pulling in and out with mercy, hitting his prostate every time.

“Want me to choke you?” Apollo asks, and Percy just nods, almost cums on the spot when he feels Apollo’s hand sneaking under his arm and pressing against his windpipes as he wraps it around his neck, cutting off his air. He lets out another loud, unrestrained sound, choked off, and Apollo, if possible, starts fucking him even harder. “*Fuck*, you sound so fucking *good*, Perseus, I want to see you like every single day.”

He tries to speak but he can’t, awful choking noises escaping his throat, and then Apollo’s hand on his hip lets go of him and reaches down, wrapping around his cock; Percy realizes that this means Apollo’s just holding him still by the neck, in a display of control and strength that heightens every sensation, and it’s all it takes for him to tense up, spill his forming tears, and cum so hard that he’s left shivering and oversensitive when Apollo keeps fucking into him until he cums, too.

Apollo lets go of his neck and Percy gasps a breath in, coughing, as Apollo coos and shushes him and hugs him into his arms, kissing his skin, mumbling about how good he was.

“Uh,” Percy lets out, still drunk, tired, pleasantly fucked out to the point he can barely handle Apollo’s hands on his skin. “...good shit.”

Apollo laughs so hard it startles them both, and Percy giggles with him, leaning back against his chest, keeping his eyes closed, letting the goofiest smile take over his lips.

“Good shit,” Apollo repeats, snickering. Percy giggles a little harder and Apollo lets out a charmed, lovesick sigh. “That’s one way to put this whole trip, Percy.”

It is. He is so happy, he doesn’t know how he’s going to deal without this afterwards. But he figures he’ll be going on a date with Apollo earlier than he thought he would be ready for, so, really...

There’s no loss. He’s determined to enjoy this little piece of Elysium, for as long as it lasts.

After Will hangs up, he turns to Kayla and goes “How did you know?”

Kayla shrugs. “Have you ever heard how dad got with my dad? It was obvious the second Lester started drooling that we’d end up here.”

Will decides to not analyze that statement too closely because the last thing he needs to think of is Percy being on his dad’s to-do list for over four, almost five years. The rest of their siblings have all but ran out of the cabin to spread the gossip, unconcerned about it the way dad is, so he turns to Nico, who’s still laughing, and shakes his shoulders.

“Nico,” he starts, shaking his head. “What the fuck is happening? What is this about Percy and Annabeth breaking up? Why is Percy with *my dad*?”

Nico shrugs; he’s awfully calm about this and Will does not like it. “I don’t know. Hazel told me Percy asked her to change the lock of his apartment and to not tell Annabeth. Whatever happened, it’s serious.”

Austin chimes in, phone in his hand. “Guys, have you read the comments of all the pictures they’ve been putting up? People are saying they saw them argue at a restaurant about marriage and Percy stormed out.”

“Marriage?” Kayla repeats, sounding horrified. “Percy and *Annabeth*? Over my dead body.”

“I agree,” Will shudders just thinking about it. “I’ve never minded Annabeth but she literally makes Percy stop smiling every time I’ve seen them together.”

“I don’t vibe,” Nico agrees, frowning, and then pulls out his phone. “I think I’ve been getting DMs to the Percy thirst trap account we’re running—”

“Shhh!” Kayla lets out, so hard it comes out hissing, a little bit of her own musical talents making it hurt to their ears, too high-pitched. “Use your inside voice! No one can find out we’re behind that account, or that Piper provides us with pictures.”

Will rolls his eyes. “I think everyone but Percy knows it’s us.”

“Focus,” Nico demands, and the four of them huddle together to look at his phone. He does, in fact, have several DMs, and he starts going through them. “Oh, yeah, that fight was definitely ugly. People that were at the restaurant are spitting facts. Apparently she proposed and got mad when he said no? Something like that.”

“Nasty,” Austin scratches his cheek. “Last time I saw Percy and Annabeth together they looked like they were gonna choke each other to death. Why the hell did she decide she wanted to make that permanent?”

“Annabeth doesn’t give up easily,” Nico points out, and they all grimace simultaneously. Yeah, she’s infamous at camp for not wanting to give up. There’s a reason the rest of the Athena cabin steer clear of whatever she’s doing at any time. “Poor Percy, though. Well, I guess he’s got the daddy of all daddies taking care of him now, so—”

“Nico,” Will deadpans, burying his face in his hands. “You didn’t just call my dad that.”

“He’s hot!”

“That is *not helpful*—”

There’s a knock at the door and the four of them jump, turning towards it. It’s Annabeth, looking pissed off, and Nico pales so much he’s practically transparent, hiding the phone with the Percy thirst account behind his back. She runs her eyes over the four of them, suspicious, then looks at Will because he’s cabin head and he’s never hated being so more than he does in this moment.

“Will,” she starts, her voice tense and cold. She looks like she hasn’t slept in five years, which is rather fitting. “It’s good to see you. Have you talked to your dad lately?”

Will flashes back to the way he called him only to have Percy answering the phone, and decides to be a liar. “Nope, why? Everything okay?”

Annabeth’s eyes narrow. “I’m sure you know he’s with Percy.”

“Oh, yeah, I saw the pictures,” Will is unable to hold back a nervous chuckle, pulling out his phone in hopes of distracting Annabeth from the one behind Nico’s back. “They’re having, like, a road trip? Looks fun. They seem to be having a great time”

“I’m sure they are,” Annabeth says, tone dry, but Will catches a flicker of rage behind her eyes that unexpectedly annoys him. It’s not his dad’s fault Percy decided to spend time with good company. “Did you know Percy tried to break up with me over the phone a couple days ago?”

They all stare in silence. It’s Kayla who finds her bravery first. “What do you mean *tried*?”

“He was being unreasonable,” Annabeth rolls her eyes, her voice coming out sharp and annoyed. “Saying crazy things about Luke of all people. So, I need you guys to do me a favor.”

“Hold on,” Austin starts, bewildered. “So what you mean is he actually broke up with you—”

“I’m gonna need you guys to tell your dad to stop,” Annabeth says, completely ignoring Austin’s deduction. They all exchange a look like they can’t believe they just heard that. “Percy is not thinking clearly right now. The last thing he needs is Apollo putting ideas in his head—”

“I’m pretty sure Percy can make his own choices,” Nico steps in front of Will, arms crossed, frowning. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed but he’s literally the coolest head in the heat of the moment, Annabeth.”

Her eyes darken. “Says you, who had a crush on him for who knows how long. You’re biased, Nico. I guess it’s all just part of Percy’s charm that he can’t turn off.”

Nico rears back like he just got slapped. Will’s mild annoyance sparks into a bonfire. “You did *not* just say that to my boyfriend. What the fuck, Annabeth?”

“I just need you to get that to Apollo,” Annabeth insists, crossing her arms. “That’s it. I would really appreciate it if you guys did— believe me, it’s for Percy’s own good.”

“How about no?” Austin snaps, rolling his eyes. “He broke up with you. Get over it. If he’s with dad, then he’s with dad. None of anyone’s business.”

“Percy would never willingly be with a god,” Annabeth shoots back, and Will recognizes denial so deep in her head that he’s actually concerned he might have to call a professional to help her with this. This can’t be healthy. “Listen, can you just do that? And don’t tell him I had anything to do with it.”

Will blinks in shock. “You think we can just tell a god what to do because he’s our dad and he’s chill? Are you insane? Annabeth, Percy just broke up with you, you can’t possibly—”

“He won’t move on from me that easily,” Annabeth presses her lips together, nostrils flaring. Kayla snorts. “He won’t. We’ve been together for so long, Percy wouldn’t—”

Will’s phone pings with a notification and they all stare at it. He swallows, because he put his dad’s notification on as soon as he saw that picture of Percy in a car with a huge hickey on his neck. But he figures there’s no possible way that they’ll get more bold, so he opens the notification...

...to be greeted with the sight of Percy Jackson in a naked in a bathtub, holding a mimosa, looking up at who *has* to be Apollo with dreamy, wide eyes that would make any person coo. His lips are red and bruised, evidently from kisses, and the hickies situation has worsened.

Like, there’s a handprint bruise around his neck yellowing, bad. He feels like a voyeur just looking at the picture and he goes to put his phone back in his pocket— only for Annabeth to step over and take it from his hand faster than Will can stop her.

She looks at it. Stares. Will waits for her to blow up, to scream, to do *anything*, but she remains impassive. Unshaken. At most, she swallows, and as much as she wants to appear unaffected Will notices the desperate, angry glint to her eye, as she gives him his phone back.

“Tell him to stop,” she says, but it sounds like she’s begging, underneath all the cold steel. “Please. Tell him to stop.”

Will’s never once looked at someone and seen this much denial and delusion, this much desperation. He feels bad for her, and yet...

“We’re not doing that, Annabeth,” Will offers, keeping his voice soft and kind, his best doctor voice. She flinches back as if he just struck her, and he wonders if this is how she’s reacted every time Percy’s said no to her about anything, like he’s purposely trying to hurt her. It would explain a lot. “I’m sorry. But you need to calm down and rest, okay? You’re not processing this clearly. Percy’s made his choice—”

“No,” Annabeth snaps, wrapping her arms around her middle and turning her back on him, hurrying out of the cabin. “No.”

Will stares after her with his mouth dropped open, but it’s Austin who puts the lingering feeling in the air into words.

“Holy shit,” he says. “She’s absolutely lost it.”

Yeah, Will thinks. Something tells him this is going to get very, very ugly.

12. Chapter 12

Notes for the Chapter:

here it is fellas, what you've been waiting for. finals week had me dead so i couldn't find energy to do the confrontation properly, but now it is here!

so i hope you enjoy how this turned out. we get a little karma. a little catharsis. all is good. all is great.

happy reading!

Apollo makes the rest of the road trip worthwhile. They decided to stay at the hotel for two more days, most of which was spent watching movies and stuffing their faces. The rest of which consisted of what Apollo could only call a mirage of a honeymoon phase, like a hot summer fling in a movie, with all the kissing and touching.

He doesn't fuck Percy again except on the last night at the hotel, after giving him a thorough massage and turning his body into jelly. His chest pressed against his back, Apollo kept his lips against Percy's ear, and reminded him of a few facts.

"You're so beautiful," he said. "You're so smart, and talented. You've taken the world by storm. It takes a lot to make a god feel grateful, and I'm extremely flattered that I can be grateful for having *you*."

Percy cried. Hard. Half from pleasure and half from the emotional depth of it all; Apollo held him through it all and wiped his tears and kissed the remains of his frown away, until Percy was able to smile again.

"Careful," Percy mumbled, his face buried against Apollo's neck. "Or you might have a hard time getting rid of me."

Apollo laughed. "As if I would ever dare."

The next morning, Percy woke up with a lot of energy, up with the sun—with him—and looked him in the eye, with a twinkle to it that reminded Apollo of that feisty sixteen-year-old who had looked Zeus in the eyes and demanded that his wishes be made reality. It felt like being hit at full-force with a hurricane; like Percy Jackson had remembered who he is, what he's done, who he wants to be.

If he was attracted to Percy before, after that look—well, Apollo feels rather helplessly, hopelessly taken by him. He decides, in that moment, that he'll shower Percy in gold, in flowers, in love, not only because it's what he wants to do, but because it's what Percy *deserves*.

If he were a god, he'd accidentally steal worship away from them all, and isn't that a delicious idea?

They hold hands during the rest of the ride to New York, unless they absolutely don't need to. Apollo's fake human heart remains restless, beating hard the whole way, and Percy's seems to follow the same beat, in his own way, like a piano and a cello playing the same melody, different but identical.

"Apollo," Percy says, once they enter the state's borders. It's nighttime, and he's been purposely driving slower and slower because he doesn't want this to end, and Percy hasn't called him out on it yet because he probably doesn't want it to end either. "Can you park by the highway?"

He does so without even asking what for. When Percy steps out of the car, he just follows; when Percy sits on the front of the car, Apollo just leans beside him, and watches him watch the few visible stars.

"Life's weird," Percy says, and Apollo hums in agreement. "Have you ever felt like that? Like it's just... like one day you gain consciousness over things again, and everything starts changing."

Apollo closes his eyes, pressing his lips together. "I don't think I have quite the same understanding you do, but I do know how it feels like to regain awareness and abandon old habits. It hasn't happened to me often... but there is Lester."

“There's Lester,” Percy repeats, thoughtful. “But it's not only him, is it?”

“No,” Apollo agrees. “It's also killing Python, both times. Building Troy, and seeing it fall. Being Achilles' end. It's Asclepius' ascension, Daphne's transformation, and Hyacinthus' death.”

Percy doesn't say anything for a few minutes, but his hand reaches over and takes his own, tangling their fingers together. Apollo opens his eyes and looks at him, gazing up at the sky, and he silently thanks Artemis for such beautiful moonlight tonight, because Percy looks otherworldly like this, like an illusion from his mind. Maybe he is and Apollo just hasn't realized it, because he can hardly believe how much he wants him.

“Moving on is never easy, is it?” Percy asks, voice low. Apollo brings their tangled hands up to his lips and kisses his knuckles. “I want to say goodbye. I want her to be okay with this—Annabeth was all I knew, for a while. I don't want to fight.”

“But you know it'll be tougher than that,” Apollo sighs, hanging his head, and wishes he could make this easier for Percy. That he didn't have to do this at all. “It'll be more than that. I've been broken up with before, I've broken up with many. It was rarely simple. And the hardest part was always that... saying goodbye. Eventually, I stopped. It hurt less.”

“And yet it's closure,” Percy breathes out. “But I have a feeling Annabeth and I have very different concepts of closure.”

“She'll have to learn to be okay with it,” Apollo says, squeezing Percy's hand. Finally, his gaze falls from the sky to him, and Apollo gives him his best smile, soft and warm. Percy smiles back. “If she truly loved you, Percy, she would see you out. She would hold your hand and drop it at the door. That's all love is; a simple exchange of eyes. Processing what's in front of you. Denial isn't a good place to be in. It's different to let someone go instead of breaking a heart. I would know it.”

Percy stares at him and scoots over closer, sliding on the car. Their shoulders meet, and Percy's free hand comes up and tangles in his hair,

pulling him in until their foreheads touch. Percy closes his eyes, while Apollo stares in awe.

“Has someone ever seen you out, Apollo?” Percy pauses. “Properly, with care?”

Apollo swallows. “There's no fairness in godhood, Perseus. Some things we don't get. A proper goodbye, closure... why need it, if you have eternity to forget about it?”

“But you haven't forgotten,” Percy points out. “Have you?”

“I remember it all a little too well,” Apollo agrees, and drops Percy's hand to hold his chin, pulling him in. “It breeds loneliness quite well, I've found.”

Percy hums. “Hm... then maybe you should notify loneliness that I intend to take its place in your essence. Okay?”

“Yes,” Apollo breathes out, nodding. “And you should notify your heartbreak that I'm seeing it out the door, if Annabeth doesn't intend to.”

Percy laughs and Apollo's restraint breaks as he pulls him in for a kiss, chaste, slow, full of understanding. For the first time that he can remember, Apollo feels seen. Not ignored, not forgotten, not abandoned, not replaced. Just touched and felt, from the start of his essence to the toes of his human shell and even further.

He's the first to pull back, but only to hold Percy's face in his hands, thumbs lovingly tracing his cheeks. He looks into those green eyes and finds vulnerability there, a softness he cannot describe.

“You'll find a way, Perseus,” Apollo says, choked up. He's always been quick to tears. “You always do.”

Percy smiles, sharp and easy. Now, that's a menace. “You should come on a quest with me sometime.”

“Oh, Percy,” Apollo coos, openly swooning. “We'll see about that.”

Percy doesn't think he's ever been as nervous as he is going up the stairs to his family's place. Apollo follows behind him, quietly, thoughtfully, while Percy runs a self-conscious hand over the fading bruises and hickies around his neck and wrists.

When his mom opens the door, though, that all fades away. With wide, sad, worried eyes, mom looks up at him and extends her arms out and Percy falls into her embrace like he's twelve all over again, bending to sob into her neck, clinging to her like a baby. She runs a hand over his back, up and down, soothing him with soft, loving words.

Then she pulls the both of them inside, pushes them into the kitchen, and sets three cups of tea down at the kitchen island, looking right at Apollo. Paul and Estelle are asleep, so it's just the three of them. "Thank you so much for helping him get here, dear."

Apollo actually blushes. "It was, uh, my pleasure. Percy's a good friend."

"A friend," Mom nods slowly, glancing between the two of them, and it's Percy who blushes under the scrutiny this time, hiding behind his tea cup. "Okay, yeah, I can get behind that."

"Has Annabeth come around yet?" Percy decides to ask, wanting to get out of this dangerous territory. Mom frowns as a result, and Apollo matches the look, and he's suddenly very aware of the possibility of Apollo giving his mother a weapon.

"She knocked yesterday," Mom shrugs. "I just put on some music to drown it out."

Percy chokes on his tea and Apollo laughs. "Oh, I like that one."

"I don't," Percy complains, and then shakes his head as he gets incredulous looks from the both of them. "I mean, I have to talk to her. Otherwise she's going to spend the next twenty years harassing me."

“There’s restraining orders!” Mom suggests, dead serious, and pouts when Percy just shoots her a look. Apollo snorts. “Gods, honey, I know what you have to do... I just wish you didn’t have to.”

“I share that sentiment,” Apollo taps his nails against the teacup, frowning down at it. Then, he looks up at Percy. “I could just curse her, you know—”

“No,” Percy snaps at him, then winces. “Sorry, it’s just... that’s too much. I just want a clean break.”

“It’s been anything but clean,” Apollo narrows his eyes, setting a hand on his shoulder. “That girl isn’t good for *herself* right now, Percy, not just you. She’s gotten away with too much. You could let me—”

“Don’t fight my battles,” Percy cuts in, meeting his eyes. Apollo seems almost offended, for a second, but then his words sink in and he gives up the fight, sighing, squeezing Percy’s shoulder once. He turns to look at his mom. “I mean it. I’ll make her snap back into reality. And if push comes to shove, well— she can’t stalk me from Boston.”

“Allegedly,” Apollo mutters, anything but pleased, so Percy elbows him, rolling his eyes. They exchange a look, though, and Apollo’s smile rises first, but Percy’s quick to follow. Then, Apollo looks at mom. “Thank you for your hospitality once more, Sally. I suppose this is where I take my leave—”

“Uh,” Percy’s hand shoots out to grab his wrist. “No, it isn’t.”

Apollo looks at mom. She presses her lips together and shrugs. “You heard him, dear.”

“Really?” Apollo raises an eyebrow at him, hesitant. “I’d assumed that my presence would only make things more... explosive and problematic.”

“I can deal with her at her worst,” Percy squeezes his wrist, three times. “She’s the one that can’t deal with me at all.”

Apollo opens and closes his mouth for a few seconds, then he nods, stunned. “Sounds about right, then. I’ll be happy to occupy your couch tonight.”

“Oh, no, Apollo,” Mom shakes her head, and throws a wink at Percy. He feels his face flaming. “Percy can share his bed. Can’t he?”

Whatever, he’ll take it. “Yep. We can’t have a god sleeping on the couch.”

Apollo looks between the two of them in shock. “You know, in ancient times, this offer would have very different connotations.”

Percy is so taken off guard by that comment that he swallows his tea wrong and chokes. Apollo is instantly on him from behind, helping him spit the tea back out, wrapping his arms around him. Percy stares at his mom, embarrassed.

She just sighs. “It’s okay, Percy. Everyone should do a god once.”

“Mom!” Percy protests, his voice cracking, which makes her laugh. Apollo has the audacity to chuckle. “You— I’m not dealing with this. I’m going to bed.”

Percy stands and rushes out of the kitchen to the sound of his mom’s laughter and Apollo calling *keep the sheets warm for me!*, ears flaming. He has a feeling leaving Apollo behind with his mom is going to result in him waking up tomorrow to find Annabeth turned into a dog or a statue or just straight up dead, but he trusts them to *not* get too overexcited. Probably.

He gets as far as slipping into his pajamas and sitting on his bed when Apollo walks in. They exchange a look as he stands in his doorway, and it feels charged with the knowledge that the fun stops tomorrow—or perhaps, that it already did, while they were sitting together on the outskirts, looking at the sky. This is a point of no return, and Percy could avoid this. He could decide to make things with Apollo not go any further.

But he looks at him, with those gorgeous, sad blue eyes, and that curl to his mouth like he knows way too much to bear, and Percy finds that he doesn’t

want to end it here. That, just maybe, he should start considering a brighter future, with someone that fits his jagged pieces best.

So he smiles at him and gestures at the bed. “Get comfy, then.”

Apollo blinks and takes a deep breath, nodding, and steps properly inside, closing the door behind him. He starts getting naked up until he reaches his underwear, and Percy stares at the expanse of bronze skin illuminated by moonlight, every shadow that falls over him, the darkness of his hair this late at night, like the sun hiding behind a cloud.

Percy sighs, and wonders if this is the feeling that filled people, when they saw all those statues of Apollo first unveiled.

“I have a confession,” Apollo says, as he sits beside Percy and takes his hand in his. Percy raises an eyebrow at him. “Annabeth might have already gotten a bit of karma from me.”

“What?” Percy asks, straightening up, nails digging into Apollo’s hand until it makes him wince. “Apollo—”

“It wasn’t anything too serious,” Apollo shakes his head, frowning. “Nothing like a curse. I just suggested to Athena that her daughter had no right to embarrass her like she did, and it’d be best for her to not show her face around Olympus for a while. I’ve since checked our architectural records, and Annabeth’s name has been removed.”

“Oh,” Percy lets out, and feels both measures of guilt and relief in him. He knows how much Olympus means to Annabeth. How much architecture does. It’s been her dream since—ever. And she’s been unable to get a job in the mortal world, so far, since New Rome is so efficient at building that they have no need for an architect like her that wants to construct monuments. “That’s... that seems rather cruel.”

Apollo hesitates, then sighs. “I’ll admit I went right for the jugular— I can’t help the way I am. But it was either that or letting Athena or Poseidon decide her fate, and they don’t give out punishments like I do. They’re direct, and simple, immediate. Designed to make you suffer above else. My

punishments... you know what I did to Cassandra, and to the Sybil of Cumae.”

Percy swallows. He does. Rachel told him all about it after Apollo ascended to godhood again, and to this day he’s both impressed and incredulous. It’s hard to look at Apollo and think that he could damn someone into eternal life but fading youth, into always being right but never being heard. He doesn’t judge him for those punishments, even if he doesn’t agree with them; that was thousands of years ago. Apollo is another person now.

That being said, he gets his point. It isn’t like he’s turning Annabeth into a hideous, murderous monster. It isn’t like he’s spitting on her tongue to get her killed or flaying her alive. He just made her face the consequences of speaking recklessly to her mother, and offending his father through the unreasonable actions Athena decided to take. He knows Annabeth probably didn’t mean for Athena to do that, but it happened, and everything goes in a chain.

He understands, and it makes him worry if perhaps, the challenge of godhood is not eternal life, but rather losing that bit of empathy that keeps you anchored. The one Apollo recovered. The one he’s shown him through this whole trip, human, yet not.

“Okay,” Percy nods, and leans his head on his shoulder, closing his eyes. Apollo’s arm wraps around his shoulders and it’s soft, warm, comforting, and he pulls him in even closer. Percy wraps his arms around his middle and it’s the best hug he’s ever gotten, aside from mom’s and Paul’s, and from Poseidon. “Okay. I get it. I’m not mad. Thank you for telling me. But, you know, she’s gonna be pissed at me about it.”

Percy can’t see it, but he can almost feel Apollo’s frown, in the way his hold around his shoulders tightens. “Oh, I know. But if I’m going to be there, Perseus, she better watch it. I don’t plan to be so kind if she offends those above her again. And no matter how much you pout at me this time—”

“Can’t you keep it verbal?” Percy asks, knowing it’s too much, knowing he shouldn’t. The last thing he wants is Apollo jumping over the natural order of things for him. He knows that if Annabeth says something truly offensive

to Apollo's face, there's nothing he can do about it, much like he couldn't do much about it when she did it to Hera. "Just... instead of cursing her. Put her in her place?"

"Her *place*, as far as I'm concerned..." Apollo starts, and then takes a deep breath. When he next speaks, it doesn't sound like what he wanted to say, but Percy appreciates that he's trying, for him. "...her place is far, far away from you, but even if you're right, I have my limits. Getting her off your back... that's my priority—*the* priority, I mean, I'm not objectifying you—"

Percy laughs and lifts his head, pulling him in for a kiss. It lingers, hot and wet, and Apollo licks into his mouth, pulling him closer, sending the most delicious shiver down his spine. It's sad to think he probably won't be getting another one of these for a while, but that's the key; it'll only be temporary. And just like Apollo intended, he'll probably be thinking about him every day, for hours on end.

They go to bed. Percy lays on his side with his back pressed to Apollo's chest, feeling the comforting weight of his arm over his middle, the tickle of his breath against the back of his neck as Apollo kisses the skin there.

"It'll be alright, Percy," Apollo whispers, and any remaining tension leaves his body. He finds that he believes him. "And I'll be right with you."

That, Percy thinks, eyes slipping closed, sounds like the sweetest promise ever.

The next morning, Percy asks Apollo and his family to give him ten minutes, one of their phones, and to remain calm.

Typing in Annabeth's phone number is easy. Dialing makes him short of breath, but it's nothing too bad. It's her answering that freezes him up.

"Sally?" Annabeth says. She sounds surprised and relieved, and Percy stares straight ahead, his tongue heavy. "Sally, thank the gods, I don't know what you've heard from Percy—"

“Annabeth,” Percy speaks up, swallowing the knot in his throat. Her words die and a quietness falls over them, cold and uncomfortable. “I was hoping we could talk.”

She doesn't say anything straight away, but when she does, her words are cutting. “Over the phone, again? Are you just unable to face me after frolicking around with Apollo in front of everyone?”

Percy presses his lips together, but he doesn't let her intimidate him. “I broke up with you. I am entitled to do whatever I want to. And now I want to see you, so we can just... reach an agreement.”

“I don't know why you think you can just break this off like this,” Annabeth takes a deep breath, and Percy clenches his free hand into a fist, trying to remain calm. “You and I can't just be over, Percy. We *can't*. What was the point of the last few years if we do? The wars? Tartarus?”

“Annabeth, you should know better,” Percy shakes his head, breathing the words out. He thinks back to when he was sixteen and desperate, of seeing Annabeth's steady, intense presence as a rock. She was beautiful to him once. He loved her once. “I don't even recognize you anymore, Annabeth. And I don't think you recognize me either.”

“I know exactly who you are,” Annabeth says, and Percy closes his eyes. She doesn't. She never has, not the way she thinks. Percy is quiet, too quiet, sometimes his thoughts are a mystery to himself, as well. He keeps so much close to his heart. Annabeth never saw through it. “I *know* what we are.”

“Are you at camp?” Percy asks, deciding it better to just move on. Change the subject. Not let her rope him in; Annabeth's always been good at being the center of attention. He's always been good at letting her be so. He can't allow her to sidetrack him. “We need to meet face to face, Annabeth.”

“If you hadn't run away, you wouldn't need to ask me,” Annabeth scoffs, and Percy clenches his jaw. “You should've broken up with me right there and then at that restaurant—”

“You should've taken the hint and given me space,” Percy snaps back, and then takes a deep breath of his own. “I'm coming over later, Annabeth. It's time to see this out.”

She doesn't say anything, for a while. And then, quietly: “I love you.”

Percy hangs up and stares at his mom's phone for about ten minutes, feeling like his heart is being squeezed out of his chest, slowly and painfully. It is not beating; the road trip killed any chance for it to do so to the rhythm of his relationship with Annabeth. What lies in his chest is an old, dead, cold thing, one that needs to be removed and buried, burned, forgotten.

It pains him, how much Annabeth refuses to see this for what it is. He can't believe this is the same girl that he was in love with.

When Percy looks up, he finds Apollo standing before him. His door never opened, so he flashed here. He probably listened to their conversation, and Percy doesn't mind it simply because it takes away the effort of explaining it.

“Are you okay?” Apollo asks, his voice soft and tender. Percy presses his lips together and shrugs, and Apollo kneels down, taking his hands in his, looking up at him with earnest, caring, and worried eyes. “Percy, if you need more time before seeing her—”

“No,” Percy shakes his head. This, he's sure of. “No, this is it. I'm just... it feels strange. I don't... I can't relate to her anymore. I just don't. It's—I can hardly believe I dated her. I can hardly believe I survived through all the games she put me through, keeping me in line. On my toes. Under control.”

“I get it,” Apollo says, nodding sadly. With eyes darker than usual and blond hair and that serious clench to his jaw, he looks more like the primal, feral sun god that so many myths claim him to be. “It's never easy to let go, even when you know it's for the best—dear gods, when I realized Commodus came back to haunt me, I dreamed so much of him. He'd been so young, once. He'd been beautiful and charming. Annabeth was once like that too, for you.”

“She was,” Percy nods, frowning down at him. “Apollo, I truly loved her.”

His voice breaks, but there are no tears. Apollo lets go of his hands to bury his fingers in his hair, pull him down until their foreheads touch. Percy closes his eyes, and allows himself to be grounded by the kiss Apollo presses to his lips, chaste and so light he could believe it a figment of his imagination.

“I know you did,” Apollo starts, soft. “And you can’t erase that. You’ll always have to live with that, and the hardest part is to let go of the good things, because you can’t live off fever dreams.”

“Is it too much to hope it’ll be fine?” Percy asks. “Is it too much to ask that she doesn’t hate me?”

Apollo doesn’t say anything straight away, which feels like confirmation. But then he sighs. “It shouldn’t be, Percy. But sometimes... sometimes cutting people off is the only thing you can do if you ever want to find your peace.”

“Peace,” Percy repeats. Has he ever known it? Has he ever just... been? In a good way? He isn’t sure, but he’s looking forward to a semblance of it. “I’d like that.”

He opens his eyes to Apollo’s overwhelming blues, and for a second he wants to drown in them all over again—forget everything else, just pull Apollo up, kiss him, feel his weight between his thighs, be held and comforted all over again, go out to another family dinner and have too much food and then have ice cream and watch movies for hours. But he can’t right now, he can’t abandon his life for it.

So, instead, Percy kisses his cheek and tangles his hands in his hair and pulls him in, leaning his chin over the top of his head. Apollo’s arms wrap around his waist and it should feel backwards, with Apollo on his knees. But something about it is magical and soothing. He can’t complain, and when he takes a deep breath in, he feels his resolve coming back full force.

“Thank you,” Percy breaths out, and Apollo hums in acknowledgement. “You’re coming with me, then?”

Apollo chuckles. “Letting you go alone wouldn’t give me many points with your mom, would it?”

Percy’s laugh comes stolen from his throat, unexpected and joyful. He rolls his eyes. “As if your Christmas gifts over the last few years didn’t do her in already.”

“What can I say?” Apollo flutters his eyelashes, clearly joking, but Percy takes his next words very seriously. “I’m just the best, aren’t I?”

Yes. Yes, he is.

Apollo considers holding Percy’s hand into camp, then decides against it—he wraps his arm around his shoulders instead and hides his gaze under his sunglasses and his emotions behind a blank stare. Percy is pink because people look at them as they do their walk of shame all the way from Thalia Grace’s former prison to the Big House, where Chiron, Nico, and of course William, wait.

“Son. Other son,” Apollo starts, blowing Will a kiss. He blows another one to Chiron. Then he bows his head at Nico. “Tiny emo.”

“I hate you,” Will and Nico let out at the same time, to which Apollo blows them another kiss. Chiron doesn’t seem amused. And then, all the eyes fall on Percy.

“Hey, guys,” Percy says, waving awkwardly. Will is looking between them and blinking as if wanting to make sure his nightmares have, indeed, come true, while Nico hides a smile behind his hand, and Chiron just *sighs*. “Uh, have any of you seen Annabeth?”

“I think she’s screaming in the woods somewhere,” Nico provides, his tone completely flat. Apollo starts smiling but quits it when he notices Percy frowning. “Beats me. She’s been touchy ever since she arrived.”

“She snapped at Nico,” Will frowns, his tone dry. Apollo mirrors it, but keeps his mouth shut because he's done enough. He's said enough. He's Percy's support now, but he has to make his own choices. Though, judging by how Percy's eyes flash with annoyance and anger, Apollo doesn't think Nico is going to go unavenged. “Said he was biased to let you, you know, do whatever you want with your life because he had a crush on you—”

“Solace, I already told you it's *fine*,” Nico breaks in. Then Will starts protesting, and Nico snaps something at him in Italian that he doesn't quite get because Chiron steps forwards to avoid letting the argument progress.

“Perseus,” he says. He seems upset and Apollo understands him perfectly; it is not easy to watch a child grow up near you, someone you thought would grow up to be a certain type of person, and be proven wrong. “It's good to see you, as always. I do wish it were under less... stressful circumstances.”

Percy pulls his lips into a thin line, nodding. “I'll try to keep it down, I just —”

“There's nothing to keep down.”

Apollo tenses up. Percy does a better job at not physically reacting but still, Apollo's touching him. The subtle way in which he freezes for a second is not lost on him, and as they turn, he dreads this whole situation. He has a bad feeling that Annabeth is, unfortunately, going to make this as difficult as possible.

She's glaring at him when Apollo looks down from the porch steps. Arms crossed, hair done in a tight ponytail, and with a stern glare on her features, she looks like a carbon copy of her mother, only with wavy, dirty blonde hair—and not in the cute way, in the *she hasn't slept for a week* way—duller eyes, and a faded Californian tan that makes her look like she got lost on the way to the dermatologist.

Gods, he has no kindness for her. She's lucky Percy's wishes are more important to him right now than punishing her hubris; it's his job to remind people of where they stand in the world. It always has been.

Perhaps sensing that Apollo and Annabeth could glare at each other all day until one of them burns up—until *she* burns up, if he wasn't wearing sunglasses—Percy steps forwards, going down one step and standing in the middle of the line of fire. He doesn't miss the defensive line of Percy's shoulders, as if Apollo needed his shielding, and it's so, so charming. But he supposes not everything is about him, because Nico, Will and Chiron are still here. Hm, that only makes it even sweeter from Percy, even if he wishes he didn't have to treat this like he probably would a quest.

“Annabeth,” Percy starts, and to Apollo's delight, his voice comes out hard and solid, confident. Her eyes snap to him and she raises her eyebrows, as if shocked by that development. “Annabeth, this is between you and me. We can go somewhere else. My cabin—”

“You think I'm going to take anything you say seriously while he's here?” Annabeth asks, tilting her head at Apollo. He sighs and, for his part, just leans against the porch railing, shooting her a smile that he *knows* is too sharp, because the way she looks away is too fast to be casual. “Percy, you ran away from your issues, like always, and you let a god treat you like he pleased—”

“Annabeth,” Percy snaps, his jaw clenched tight. This time, his tone is heated, angry. She actually reels back. “Do *not* start. When the fuck have I ran away from my issues? When I refused to retrieve Zeus's bolt? When I abandoned Grover in the Sea of Monsters? When I left *you* to die holding the sky, or when I stayed with Calypso? Maybe when I didn't fight Kronos? When I allowed Akhlys to kill us?”

“Don't act like you don't know what I meant,” Annabeth snaps back, taking a step forward. She looks as unhinged as Athena did when the Romans took her statue, like she's getting a toy taken away from her. “You always do this. You focus so much on your shit that you forget everyone else has emotions too—”

“You're right, I know exactly what you mean,” Percy interrupts. “I was always too busy wondering if I would die or not to decide whether I wanted to take a girl obsessed with the enemy on a date.”

People are starting to stare. Apollo is enjoying the show, of course; any unoccupied Olympian is probably watching right now, as well. But it's easy to expect that from the gods, and there's nothing that can be done about that. The campers, however, are an issue. They're gathering, little half-god gossip bugs that they are, and Percy either doesn't care or is too distracted by their argument to notice. He can already tell they're going to go in circles, if left like this.

"Maybe if you said anything at all, ever, I would understand you better!" Annabeth says, to which Apollo rolls his eyes. "Maybe if you stopped playing dumb—!"

"You only mean that when I tell you things you want to hear!" Percy breaks in. "Whenever I tried to speak to you about Luke, you shut down. Whenever I tried to say something about Tartarus, you told me to forget about it. You've only ever listened when you cared, and you rarely care!"

"I looked for you for months when you went missing!"

"And then you were all over my shit trying to get me to graduate with you instead of taking a sabbatical! I let it happen and I didn't even *know* what the fuck I wanted to do with my life—"

"It was *your* idea to move to New Rome, Percy—"

"That never meant I didn't want to come back!"

"How fucking convenient for you," Annabeth scoffs, rolling her eyes. Percy takes a deep breath instead of instantly replying, and Apollo decides to break in because seemingly every soul at camp is gawking right now. Even the naiads are poking their heads out from the lake. He opens his mouth, but Annabeth's eyes snap to him and the fire behind them goes wild. "Stay out of this, Apollo. I don't even know what you think you're doing here. You've already ruined enough."

He raises his eyebrows. "My, I was under the impression that Percy was the one that broke up with you days ago. You know, it's not that difficult to take

a hint after someone says no to your proposal. I don't think I ruined a single thing, missy."

Annabeth ignores him and looks back at Percy. "I still can't believe you went straight to him."

"I didn't," Percy rolls his eyes, crossing his arms. Apollo looks him up and down and sees the shaking of his hands; it instantly makes him wish he could flash him away and turn Annabeth into a shrub. Something bitter and jealous. There's nothing stopping him, of course... except for those nasty human morals. Sometimes, they aren't worth it. "We ran across each other. He helped me realize some things about us."

"Oh, I'm sure he did," Annabeth snorts, with no mirth, shaking her head. "After all, his cabin is so full, they get a new kid without fail every year, I just didn't think easy was your type—"

Apollo is up in her face in less than a literal blink. His sudden presence pushes her back as he removes his sunglasses, and he knows his eyes flash golden; an inheritance from his father, from Kronos. Annabeth's eyes widen as she looks at him, clearly taken aback, shocked, even, that he would dare do anything at her words. As if he isn't an Olympian. As if he isn't older than she could ever grasp from words.

"Now, now," Apollo starts, keeping his voice soft. It's hard, holding back. Not returning to old patterns. Annabeth should be running right now, he should be hunting her. Call Artemis, make this interesting, even if he doubts she'd last very long under his target, let alone under both of them. "Tell me, Annabeth Chase, are you familiar with myths?"

She swallows. "What are you—?"

"Have you ever had a single logical line of thought in your head?" Apollo continues. "Has it ever occurred to you that insulting an Olympian to their face is not the smartest idea? No wonder Hera hates you. I would have you flayed for less than what you just said. Than what you've said to her. You're great at academics, right? Tell me, who punishes hubris?"

“All the gods—” She starts, but Apollo shushes her, rolling his eyes. She throws him an incredulous look, affronted. “Who do you think you are?”

Ah.

Percy’s so, so lucky he likes him as much as he does. That Apollo’s changed, that his human heart was bared. Otherwise, he’d be dragging Annabeth’s body from the back of the sun chariot.

“All the gods punish hubris, you’re absolutely right,” Apollo nods. “But there’s only one stellar example of moderation, order, and knowledge. Only one god who will demand those values of you. Who is that?”

Annabeth actually hesitates. He wonders if she thinks he’s still Lester, or if she’s just this impertinent. “Domains nowadays aren’t cut so simple.”

“They never were, child,” Apollo shakes his head, chuckling. “And your refusal to acknowledge who it is that is speaking to you is astonishing. You’re just like your mother, except Athena knows better than to cross me.”

“She won the Trojan War,” Annabeth says, as if it’s some great piece of knowledge; as if a sixth grader couldn’t pull that out of their ass. “She’s just as important and powerful as you.”

“Your *mother*, Annabeth,” Apollo sets a hand on her shoulder and squeezes, lightly, barely a touch. She jumps all the same, stepping back. “Is my little sister. And before her, there was Aphrodite. There was Ares. There was Artemis, and there was me. I’m older than your mother. I am the blueprint for everything that she is. I was Zeus’ favorite once, as well. I decided if cities were to be built, so she could be their patron. I embellished the arts. Aegis was in my hands before it was in hers. Know your place, Annabeth Chase. Or I’m afraid I’ll have to put you there.”

He pauses, watching her pale face, her wide, scared eyes. He hums. “Who do you think gave your mother the idea to take away your job title? Be careful. I can ruin you. I stitched humans into shape with my bare hands. I know how to undo them. Next time you speak to an Olympian, have some respect.”

“That’s enough,” Percy breaks in. His voice sounds choked, and Apollo pulls back his overbearing essence, dropping his sunglasses back down, stepping away. He can feel all of camp let a collective breath of relief out, and he has no better idea than to turn to Percy and lift an eyebrow. He finds a pleading, but understanding look, if scared for her. “If you’re going to do it... be kind.”

He already knows him well. “I took away her job for you. This one's for me.”

Percy doesn’t look happy, but he nods. Apollo turns back to Annabeth, who’s backed away, and now their audience is tense again. He sighs, slipping his hands in his pockets, and smiles.

“Annabeth, do you know what I did to Cassandra?”

Her eyes widen. Ah, finally. Real fear, real urgency. “Lord Apollo, please —”

“Oh, so it’s Lord now?” Apollo clicks his tongue, shaking his head. “That’s a little late, I’m afraid. But I’ll be nice, don’t worry. I’ll make it gradual.”

And before Annabeth or anyone else can react, he spits on her eyes. It’s an old, even disgusting way of cursing someone, but he’s feeling sharp today, ancient. Her pride has been enough to pull out those raw parts of him, from when he used to strike down people without thought. It’s clinical, cold, the way he goes about it. Revenge always is. Balance always is. Justice and order are old friends of his. You don’t mess with the divine if you don’t want them to mess with you.

Apollo looks around at their audience, and raises a finger. “Now, kids. I *didn’t* flay Marsyas. I just watched while everyone else did. Take this as a lesson. Remember, I’m the *nice* Olympian.”

“We’ll talk about this later,” Percy rushes out, not looking straight at him, walking over and grabbing Annabeth by the elbow, who’s rubbing her eyes in horror. Before he takes her away, he turns and looks at him, eyes wide, up and down. All things considered, Apollo thought he’d be more upset. He

might have ruined his chance at a date—or, judging by how Percy licks his lips, cemented it. He's willing to go for fifty-fifty. "Yeah, I—privacy."

"What did you do to me?" Annabeth demands, her voice panicked, even as Percy drags her away. "What did you do?"

Apollo shrugs. "I hope you enjoyed having eyes."

As Percy enters the Poseidon cabin and shuts the door behind him, Apollo looks around at the rest of camp. His children, his friends. Chiron. He spies Dionysus in a corner, nodding with approval, madman that he is.

"Dad," Will speaks up, and Apollo fears, for a second, that he pushed it too far. But he looks at him, he doesn't seem horrified. "That was... I mean, that was terrifying and please don't do that in front of me again but, uh—"

"Kinda cool," Nico nods. Chiron buries his face in his hands, and for that, he is sorry. But only sort of. "No wonder your Mythomagic card got buffed."

Apollo tilts his head in confusion. "It what now?"

Annabeth pushes his hands off her as soon as he closes the door. She screams. "How could you let him do that?!"

Percy resists the urge to slam his head against the wall. Gods, he can hardly believe that just happened. He can hardly believe he was only upset about it because he can't help feeling people's pain; the second he was able to separate that emotion from the situation, all that empathy his mother nurtured in him, he saw it for what it was, and he's not sorry. This has very little to do with him.

"Annabeth, you shouldn't have said that to him," is all he says, setting his hands on her shoulders. It feels wrong to touch her but he needs her to calm down, because he really wants to get this over with. What Apollo just did, beyond the cruelty—gods. Gods, it was kinda hot. "You shouldn't have. I

couldn't have stopped him if I wanted to, and it could have been so much worse—”

“You’re not the one who’s gonna lose it all!” Annabeth breaks in, and he sees the tears forming. He can’t even be angry or upset for her anymore. He’s always known Annabeth’s big mouth was going to get her in trouble. She likes to call him reckless and disrespectful, but he’s only been so when pushed. Or when allowed to. She always does it at the wrong time. “He’s insane! This— I can’t, I can’t live like this, my job—”

“Annabeth,” Percy shakes her, slightly, and she tries to break away from him again, but he holds her tight, looking into her eyes through her tears. “Annabeth, I’m sorry. I’m *sorry*, but I’m so tired of saving you from yourself. I can’t do it anymore. This is over and you need to accept that.”

“What did I do wrong?” Annabeth demands, shaking her head. She closes her eyes and lets out a choked off sob, and Percy doesn’t fight it when she clings to the front of his shirt. “Percy. What did I do so wrong? Where did I fail?”

She can’t see it. The meaning behind Apollo’s punishment rears its head; if she can’t see what’s in front of her, she might well not see at all. It’s almost bittersweet how fitting it is. “Annabeth, I can’t... I can’t tell you. It’s—we’d be here forever. And I can’t make you understand. You’re not ready to process this. You never have been. I wasn’t until you shocked me with those rings. And now it’s your turn to wake up.”

“I don’t want to,” Annabeth says, her voice shaking, and moves closer, hugging his middle. Percy closes his eyes because gods, he doesn’t want to. He doesn’t want to allow her to do this but if he doesn’t, it’ll just take longer. If he doesn’t let her have her moment, Annabeth might not let him walk away. “Gods, Percy, I don’t *want to*. I love you. I—I’ve been planning our lives for so long. I thought it was gonna be fine. You promised.”

“I made a promise I couldn’t keep,” Percy sighs. He understands, in a way, the failure that she’s feeling. But he doesn’t let it overcome him. “I loved you. I loved you even if I wasn’t supposed to. That was real. All the good things, Annabeth—it was real. But that doesn’t make the rest of it good. It

was killing us. It was killing. And you can't allow it to kill you too. There are so many things you could do, Annabeth. You don't have to live by a plan."

"It's the only thing I've ever been good at," her fists squeeze his shirt, and then she pushes him away, hard; only the fact that he was bracing himself for it, way too familiar with how she gets when she's upset, keeps him from tripping. "Fuck, Percy, I can't. I can't."

"You *have* to let it go," Percy insists. "Do you think I want you to suffer, for real? Do you think I enjoyed watching you get that punishment? I didn't. I didn't feel sorry for you either, because you walked right into it, but I'm not going to sit here and pretend that I'm enjoying any of this. You think I didn't cry, too? You think that I didn't hate myself for walking out on you? You think it was easy, looking at all of our relationship with clear eyes, and realizing that we were not good for each other?"

"I can fix it," she goes, and Percy runs a hand through his hair in horror. "Please. Just tell me what I did wrong. Percy, I can fix this—"

"Annabeth, you can't fix something you've already thrown out, okay?" Percy gestures at her, at himself. "This never worked. Maybe it could've, but it didn't, not for long. And I'm tired of fighting. I just want something to be a little more simple for once. I just want something that doesn't make me question what the fuck I've wasted the last five years of my life on."

"It wouldn't be a fight if you just listened!" Annabeth snaps. "If you did what I planned for us! I tried so hard to make you, and nothing fucking worked, not even sex—"

"Sex?" Percy asks, baffled. "You mean making me eat you out until you had enough and then make me fuck you even though I didn't feel like it to make up for it? You thought that would make me happy?"

"It's what works for everyone else," Annabeth claims. She sounds demented. "And I don't understand why it didn't work for you!"

“Because you can’t put people in boxes, Annabeth!” Percy shakes his head at her. “You can’t put me in a box. And our issues had very little to do with sex. No, our issues go all the way back to you treating me like dirt under your shoe because I wasn’t what you wanted me to be. I wasn’t Luke. And no matter how hard *I* tried, you always got mad.”

“Please,” Annabeth snorts, wiping her tears. “Like you’re all innocent and perfect.”

“I’m not,” Percy takes a deep breath. “I’m not, I never have been. And you’ve never been happy with that. You’ve always wanted me to be one thing, you’ve always had this image of me in your head, and you didn’t even know what the fuck I did during the school years. You didn’t know shit about my family before Paul. I know you, Annabeth, I actually do, and I can’t believe it took me this long to realize all the shit that comes with you.”

“You think being with you is easy?” Annabeth squares her shoulders, glaring at him. He can’t help but be glad she probably won’t get to do that again soon enough. “You think it’s easy to have a literal weapon sleeping beside you every night? Depending on you?”

Percy presses his hands against his face. “You’ve been afraid of me since Tartarus. Why the fuck would you stay?”

“Because I was willing to overlook it!” Annabeth yells. “I was willing to ignore everything that is wrong with you! You are so slow at doing anything academic—”

“I have ADHD and dyslexia, and my mom isn’t some mind goddess that can make it all better!”

“That’s just an excuse!” Annabeth refutes, and Percy can’t handle this. He can’t. She’s too far gone. “Getting words out of you is a pain in the ass. Every time we go out I have to speak for you, because if I don’t people get the wrong impression about you—”

“And what is that impression, Annabeth?” Percy asks. “What do you think people think of me? That I’m introverted and quiet? Because, I don’t know if you’ve noticed over the ten years we’ve known each other, but I *am* introverted and quiet, and I’ve *always* hated that people think I’m some troublemaker when hardly any of the trouble I’ve gotten into in my daily life has been my fault.”

“People think that you hide things,” Annabeth shakes her head, eyes wide. “People think you could kill them, which you could!”

“That’s not my fault!” Percy gestures at her. “You’re just projecting onto them! I can’t control how people see me and I don’t know why you want to!”

“Because I’m looking out for you!”

“*How?!?*” Percy stresses the word out. “How is that looking out for me? You build me up to be this insane person, this insane hero, and I don’t want any of that attention. I don’t want them to think I’m a reckless idiot, because that’s how you paint it every time!”

“But you *are* a reckless idiot! You walked out on me!”

“Because I couldn’t *handle* you anymore, Annabeth!” Percy truly raises his voice for the first time, matching her volume, and he hates it, he absolutely hates it, but he feels like it’s the only way he can get her to truly listen. “You were talking to me about a guest list, about a venue, about fucking getting engaged when the thought hadn’t even crossed my mind, ever. You were talking about us like we were just some dolls for you to play with!”

Annabeth shakes her head at him. “It was just part of my plan.”

“Fuck those plans,” Percy yells. “I never signed up for them! I didn’t sign a contract!”

“I was just trying to make it work!”

“Well, it didn’t!” Percy runs his hand through his hair, feeling tears of frustration making his eyes moist. He rubs them away with his fingers, because this situation doesn’t deserve his tears. Not anymore. “It didn’t. None of your plans ever do unless they’re someone else’s, and guess what, I don’t exactly like pretending to be someone else. I can’t be Luke. I can’t be whoever you think I am. And I’m walking out right now, and I’m telling you, you *have* to let it go.”

“And what if I can’t?” Annabeth asks. She sounds terrified. She looks it, too. Percy can’t imagine what must be going through her head right now, not anymore, but he has a feeling it starts with denial and ends with stubbornness. “What if I can’t let you go?”

Percy shakes his head. “Then I hope you enjoy loneliness. I sure didn’t.”

Annabeth wraps her arms around herself and sobs. And if this were any other situation, Percy would be weak. He wouldn’t be able to resist offering comfort; he’s always been too willing to do so, learned from a young age from when his mom was upset because of Gabe that it was one of the kindest things to do.

But he thinks about Apollo’s words, about it being better to cut someone off, no matter how well you want things to turn out. Sometimes, people shouldn’t be given a second chance. Much less so a dozen new ones, or more. And he knows Annabeth. She has a way of pulling people in; she’s extroverted, shallowly friendly, pretty. Passionate. But Percy’s come to learn that if you stand too close to a ten, you might not recognize it when your alarm starts ringing at eleven.

“We need help, Annabeth,” Percy says, and walks until his hand grabs the door handle. He closes his eyes and sighs. “And I can’t give you mine anymore.”

He waits for something, anything. And then something small hits his back and rattles when it hits the floor; he turns, looks down, and clenches his jaw.

The rings.

“Leave,” Annabeth says. She’s not looking at him. Percy can’t tell if she’s finally starting to process, or just too shocked to do anything else. “Leave.”

“This is my cabin,” Percy points out, bending down to pick up the rings. He stares at them, and a shiver goes down his spine. Gods, to think this could’ve been his life. “Remember to close the door behind you.”

And with that, Percy turns, opens the door, and walks out.

Annabeth doesn’t see him out. But that’s okay.

Apollo’s sitting at the camp’s hearth, flanked by Will and Nico, looking directly at him as he slips the rings in his pocket. All he wants to do is sit next to him and drown in his arms, and that’s exactly what he plans to.

Apollo raises an eyebrow at him, with a silent question, as he watches him approach.

Percy nods. All is good.

Notes for the Chapter:

thoughts??? 🤞

13. Chapter 13

Notes for the Chapter:

welp. idk how i did this. but i finished this fic lmao.

this story was 100% just a spur of the moment thing. i vaguely had a plan. and im happy with how it turned out. so, this chapter is a little bit of a closure. it isn't really necessary i guess, but i just think it's nice. a little look into what percy's life is like now, and how it'll look in the future with apollo.

i hope you enjoyed this trip with me. thanks for reading

“Page three on the syllabus,” Percy answers to his classmate, glancing at another one of them as the dude hands over his test. “You'll find a good overview of the next block there. My recommendation? Record the classes. Dr. Brighton always says a lot of things that aren't on paper and that can really help you grasp things—”

“Thank you so much, Percy,” the girl flutters her eyelashes, and finally hands over her test. He glances at it and tries not to wince too visibly at all the highlighter she used; he's making Apollo grade that one. “Say, are you free this weekend?”

“Eh, I guess?” Percy shrugs, going through his schedule in his head. He vaguely notices Apollo moving closer to where they stand by his desk. “Uh, I'm not a really good tutor, though, but Mr. Brighton's office hours—”

“Ah,” the girl lets out, and her whole demeanor changes, her shoulder sagging. She sighs in what appears to be disappointment. “Well, worth a try. See ya, Percy!”

He watches her walk away in confusion, and Apollo coughs a laugh into his fist in order to hide his amusement. He turns towards him with a frown, mouthing at him. *What was that?*

Apollo shrugs, playing innocent, but his smirk is telling. Percy can only imagine the relentless teasing he'd be suffering if they were alone in the classroom.

It's another twenty minutes before the remaining students taking the test filter out. Percy holds his stack of exams and sighs as he leans against Apollo's desk; when the last person *finally* leaves, Apollo is instantly giggling.

"Percy," he says, leaning his chin on his hand, sitting down on his chair. He raises an eyebrow at him. "You were being flirted with."

Percy blinks. "Oh. I didn't notice."

"This has happened several times," Apollo clicks his tongue. Percy none-too-subtly stares at his disguise, because Dr. Brighton is extremely hot; barely into his thirties, blond, blue-eyed, buff. He'd been gobsmacked, seeing him that first time, but since then Percy's warmed up *quite* well to this version of Apollo. "Percy, my eyes are up here."

Percy keeps staring at his arms, even as his cheeks flush. "Oh, I know."

"How did you find the test?" Apollo changes the subject, and Percy regretfully looks away from his arms to meet his gaze, sighing a bit too dreamily to be casual under those blue eyes. He glares at him. Apollo's smile widens. "Good, I hope."

"You're teaching an introductory philosophy class," Percy rolls his eyes. "Why are you putting us through three-hour exams and a one-hour oral exam?"

"Because I want you all to learn, of course," Apollo shrugs, a little too casual. His eyes twinkle, blue shifting into gold, and Percy's breath catches. "And I do like hearing your voice."

Percy blushes even redder than before, clearing his throat. "I shouldn't have agreed to be your TA."

Apollo laughs and gods, Percy has never been religious, but something about the sound makes him want to cross his heart and get on his knees and pray. It's been like this for the six months ever since their spontaneous road trip and consequent affair worthy of an R-rated movie.

They haven't gone on a date yet. Apollo had asked him on one, on the three-month mark, shortly after he became his TA. But Percy's life was still a bit of a mess and he seriously couldn't spare any energy on dating yet, so he said no, with no hard feelings. And they kept talking and going out together and flirting ever since. It's been torture. Percy keeps waiting for Apollo to make a move and it never comes and he thinks that if they keep going like this any longer Percy's gonna grow hair on his palm from how often he's been jerking it to him.

So, as he watches Apollo's blinding smile with those arms that could probably break his neck and the hint of stubble on his jaw, Percy swallows, and almost physically feels the camel's back breaking.

He drops his stack of exams on the desk and leans his hands on it, arching his back a little, looking at Apollo with wide, soft eyes and licking his lips. The look immediately earns him the clenching of Apollo's jaw and wandering eyes and gods. Sometimes Percy forgets, because Annabeth did a number on him that will take time to fully shake off, but it feels *amazing* to be desired like this, with every single one of his flaws already displayed and bared.

"So," Percy starts, trying to appear casual, clearing his throat. Apollo tilts his head to the side, visibly swallowing as he looks up at him, evidently struggling to keep his eyes on his face. He throws him a smile and climbs over the desk, leaning back closer to him, letting his legs dangle in the air from how far back he's sitting. Apollo sighs, keeping his eyes on him. "Are *you* free this weekend?"

Apollo takes in a sharp breath, blinking like he's trying to cast off some spell put upon him. "Well, we are supposed to grade these tests, aren't we?"

Percy pouts. "But do we *have* to?"

“Yes, you brat,” Apollo snorts, and looks him up and down again. He lets out another sigh that Percy almost echoes. “Is this you asking me on a date, then?”

“Obviously,” Percy says, trying not to let his nerves show. He knows Apollo wants him—even during class he isn't subtle and Percy's heard one too many jokes from his classmates—and that it's more than a physical thing, as well, because they've already fucked. He's already ruined him. He doesn't think Apollo would've stuck around if that had been all he wanted. “You weren't making any moves. I got tired of waiting.”

“I wasn't sure you were ready,” Apollo confesses, his voice softening. Then he lets out a deep breath and starts picking up his things, looking at Percy through his eyelashes. “I do apologize for the delay, sweetheart, but I'll make it up to you. How about we turn grading into a date this weekend?”

“I thought those grading sessions were already dates,” Percy grins, being contrarian on purpose. Apollo lets out a chuckle, rolling his eyes. “We had pizza together. We saw movies. Was I getting mixed signals?”

“No, those were definitely dates,” Apollo nods, standing up, and he pats Percy's thigh as he walks past him towards the door, making him jump. “Off the desk, baby, you have class to go to. I'll take those exams off your back for now.”

Percy groans, throwing his head back. “Don't wanna.”

When he looks up, Apollo's standing with his hand on the door handle and staring at him with dark, hungry eyes. Percy squirms, and it's enough to send shivers down his spine. Somehow, he feels like he just got scolded and spanked, despite Apollo not saying a single word. He lowers himself back on his feet and picks up half of the tests, raising an eyebrow at Apollo.

“If I leave you alone with this you'll just grade it all,” Percy points out, as an excuse. He waves the papers at him as he approaches. “Besides, it'll give you even more motivation to come see me this weekend.”

“Please, Perseus,” Apollo shakes his head, and reaches out with a hand to caress his cheek, a touch so light yet intense enough that Percy's left breathless and red. “As if I need more reason to see you other than my desire to. I'll be there. How does pizza and wine sound?”

“Not that different from a normal date,” Percy grins, a little cheeky, because hearing confirmation made him giddy and flustered. He's tempted to roll on the balls of his feet and giggle like a schoolgirl, but successfully restrains himself. “It's perfect.”

Apollo smiles, leans in, and drops a feather-light kiss against his cheek. He makes eye contact when he pulls back and opens the door. “Only the best for you, Percy.”

Percy sighs, taking one last, longing look at Dr. Brighton's absolutely disarming face for what remains of this week. “I'll see you.”

Percy has a beer that Piper left behind the last time she visited a couple months back. He doesn't like beer, but he doesn't have any other drinks around and he needs at least a semblance of liquid courage. He's already red and squirming and he most definitely put himself in this situation but gods. It's worth it. Apollo's going to lose his shit—hopefully not before Percy does.

When he arrived in New York six months ago, the plan was for him to live with his parents and Estelle, at least for a little while. Instead, Rachel called him, after having heard of all the shit he'd been through from Will. She offered him a tiny-itty-bitty studio apartment in his price range with a discount (since her father owns the building). He said yes because after living with Annabeth for so long, he felt like trying out independence.

It's gone great. He can do whatever the fuck he wants whenever the fuck he wants as long as he doesn't bother his neighbors. Percy doesn't have to clean up after anyone, and admittedly, as much as he loves Estelle, not living with a child allows him to do things he wouldn't be able to otherwise.

Namely, bring Apollo over every other weekend to do TA work and flirt. And now... have a date.

The buzzer scares the shit out of him and he almost drops his beer when he rushes over to buzz Apollo in. He's surprised that he didn't just flash in, because he usually does that—especially when Percy's just come out of the shower—but he is not complaining, since it gives him a minute or two to take a deep breath and compose himself, checking his reflection in the bathroom mirror.

He didn't dress up; he's just in an oversized hoodie and shorts, because he thought Apollo would appreciate that more than an unnecessary amount of clothes. When he opens the door, he's proven right.

“Perseus, lovely evening, a pleasure to—” Apollo's eyes drop to his legs and he purses his lips, nodding rather seriously. He glances back up, meeting his eyes. “A pleasure, in general. Feeling comfy tonight?”

Percy takes the wine bottle from his hand stepping aside to let him in. He admits, as he closes the door behind him, that he stares at how fucking deliciously tight that tweed jacket is on him; he's wearing something similar to what Dr. Brighton would, despite looking younger, and it's already doing all sorts of things to him.

“Yep,” Percy's voice comes out just a little breathy, as Apollo sets the two pizza boxes in his hand down on his coffee table crammed ridiculously close to his sofa. It's a hazard, but it's New York. Having a coffee table and walls around his room is basically a luxury. “You seriously brought over your half of the exams?”

He gestures at the laptop bag Apollo's wearing, snorting, and he shrugs, looking not sorry at all. “To be *fair*, I didn't grade anything yet. Are you proud of me?”

Percy sighs and drops himself on the couch, letting the wine rest next to the pizza, then reaches underneath to pull out the folder with his half of the exams. “I went through a couple. I think you went too hard on them this time.”

Apollo waves his hand in the air, dropping beside him and casually making two wine glasses appear on the coffee table. "Nonsense. Did you struggle?"

"A bit," Percy admits, and Apollo raises an eyebrow. He rolls his eyes, biting back a smile. "Less than I expected to."

"Then they should've been readily prepared if they paid attention to class," Apollo clicks his tongue, shaking his head, uncorking the wine and pouring it in the two glasses. He hands Percy one, and takes his own in hand, leaning back against the couch with an arm over the armrest, eyes warming. "Enough of that, though. Let's feast. A toast?"

Percy covers his smile with his hand, feeling like a blushing schoolgirl again as he clinks their glasses together, nodding. "Here's to passing Philosophy 101."

Apollo laughs and gods, Percy wants to keep that sound playing over and over forever and ever. "To *us*, Perseus."

Percy opens the first pizza box and actually moans at the smell, hungry. Apollo chokes, then acts as if nothing happened. Once they're each on their third slice and Apollo's explained to him what new poetry he's read lately, Percy sighs.

"I heard from Hazel the other day," Percy comments, and watches Apollo pause at his tone before meeting his eyes. "Annabeth's fully blind now. She's moving in with her dad as she adapts."

Apollo keeps his expression carefully neutral, as he chews. After he swallows, he speaks, voice measured. "I would offer to lift the curse, if that's what you want, but I won't. She paid the price for her insolence."

"I wasn't going to ask you to," Percy shakes his head, offering him a smile. He hesitates for only a second before continuing. "I was actually going to thank you for assigning her to the right therapist. She's doing... well, Hazel says she's still a little in denial, but she's better than before. Working through stuff."

“I only did it because William insisted,” Apollo pauses, pressing his lips together. “And how do you feel about this? I know I referred you to an amazing therapist, as well, but you haven't really told me that much about how you feel about everything in a while.”

“That's because I'm doing better, too,” Percy licks his lips, shifting in his seat. He gestures for Apollo to refill his wine glass, his third tonight, and reaches for another slice of pizza. “I wouldn't have called it a date between us otherwise, to be honest. I never thanked you for giving me space to sort myself out, so thanks for that, too. I'm just... I feel good. I feel balanced, and that's really new for me.”

Apollo's eyes are warm and dark like honey, his gaze just as sweet as he reaches over and squeezes Percy's knee. Just an innocent, reassuring touch before taking his hand back. “I'm glad, Percy. I really am. And you have no idea how thankful I am to you for sparing me even a single glance, when you could have anyone else you wanted.”

Percy smiles. “You could have anyone else, too, and you know this.”

“True,” Apollo nods, winking at him. Percy sighs and squirms, biting his lip, blushing more than he should. Apollo sends him a considering look. “But I don't think there's anything quite like you out there. There's hardly anything else I want.”

“Gods,” Percy mumbles, glancing down at his glass and half-eaten pizza slice. “We're supposed to grade these now, after saying all that?”

“Yep!” Apollo downs the rest of his glass of wine and sets it on his coffee table, grabbing his half of the stack of exams. Percy pouts at him but Apollo just throws him another wink from under those wire-rimmed glasses and gods. Gods, gods, maybe the surprise was a bad idea. “You cool with it?”

Percy lets out a sigh. “Yeah, whatever. You're gonna give me a reward later, though, right?”

Apollo grips his thigh and Percy almost jumps out of his body. “Of course, baby. Anything you want.”

“Anything?” Percy presses, scooting closer to him. He doesn’t know if he can hold himself back anymore because really, it’s starting to get uncomfortable. Apollo raises an eyebrow at him, but doesn’t stop him. His mouth drops open when Percy drops to his knees and inserts himself between his legs, looking at him with the baby seal look that he’s always pretended to be unaware of. “What if I give you a different kind of help?”

“Uh,” Apollo says dumbly, then clears his throat, looking at the exams in his hand. He pulls out a pen from his back pocket and considers it for a second, thinking. Then, his expression evens out into something serious, darker, and he tilts his head at him slightly before looking down at the exams and bringing his pen to the paper, ready to mark a question, as he reads. “Well, go ahead, why don’t you? I’ll be with you when I’m done here.”

Percy stares. “What?”

“What?” Apollo echoes back, scribbling on the paper, only glancing at Percy for a quick shrug before marking the first question. “Aren’t you my assistant? Assist me. I want to get through this tonight.”

That shouldn’t be hot. That, in fact, should make him furious, but Percy’s had a few glasses of wine and there’s that surprise he planned, and the smug, playful smirk sitting at the corner of Apollo’s lips heats him up from the inside. He’s drooling. Without much further thought, Percy runs his hands over Apollo thighs, muscular and strong enough to crush him, enjoying the squeeze he gives them before going right for his belt and undoing his button.

Apollo’s already getting hard and Percy feels *giddy*. He has to swallow after he pulls Apollo’s underwear down because fuck, he’s missed that cock. Every night for six months. Has jerked off to it so often he doesn’t think there’s that many fantasies that he hasn’t come up with, but he definitely hadn’t thought of *this*.

He glances up at Apollo’s face as he takes him in hand, and unconsciously lets out a needy sound when all he does is turn the exam page he’s grading

to continue on the other side. Like Percy isn't even here. Like he's just a toy that's supposed to keep him pleased.

Fuck, Percy's whole body clenches at the thought. He leans in, zeroing on Apollo's half-hard cock, and licks a stripe on the side, moaning a little exaggeratedly because he's not letting Apollo forget about his presence. It gets him no reaction other than the slight twitching of Apollo's leg and he counts that as a win, dropping a kiss on the head, licking the slit as he grabs the base and then letting the tip enter his mouth.

Gods, he can't believe how much he likes this. He sucks Apollo softly, then starts taking him bit by bit, deeper and deeper, wanting to feel him all the way down the back of his throat, wanting to choke on it again. Drool leaks from his mouth as he reaches the halfway point and he stops to moan and take in a deep breath, as deep as he can.

"I think you were right," Apollo comments, nonchalant, as Percy keeps attempting to choke on his cock. "They struggled with the last few questions. I already went through yours, though. You did great."

Percy moans, sucking him, pulling away only to go back in several times, trying to replicate the feeling of Apollo fucking into his mouth, because the asshole doesn't even budge; it's criminally arousing and there must be something wrong with him that he thinks this is hot, but it just *is*.

"You're getting quite messy down there," Apollo chuckles, and Percy hears the sound of him placing another graded exam down on the coffee table. "You were really made for this, Percy. Is this why you were so ready to be my TA? Wanted this to happen every day, maybe even during class?"

The thought makes him dizzy. He whimpers, and feels his entirely body shiver when Apollo sets his hand on top of his head. "Tell you what, sweetheart, since you're such a good slut for my cock—if you make me cum, I'll give everyone else in the class an average passing grade, and then I'll reward you for being such a good fucktoy. What do you think?"

Percy tries to nod, only to choke on Apollo's cock, and digs his nails into his thighs, squirming uncomfortably yet feeling high on this. On the

dizziness of lacking air, on the heat of Apollo's cock down his throat. He puts his all into this, bobbing his head, taking what he can't reach in his hand, occasionally dropping his hand lower to caress Apollo's balls.

He starts getting little moans of appreciation and it's all he needs for desperation to go all the way up to his head and he's pulling away, looking up, meeting Apollo's eyes as he keeps jerking him off and licking his lips. He makes his voice as whiny as possible. "Am I doing good, Daddy?"

Percy hears all the breath leaving Apollo's lungs and actually tears up in victory when he feels his hand roughly grabbing his head and pushing him down back on his cock. "You're such a *filthy* brat, aren't you? You act all good, but you want to be treated so mean."

Gods, *fuck yeah*. Apollo fucks his mouth and it hurts a little in the best way possible; he can't stop making noise, muffled and incoherent but most definitely happy, and by now he's squeezes his legs so hard together to be able to hold back that he's starting to get sore.

Apollo pulls him back and Percy gasps, staring up at him with wide eyes. His hand runs through his hair with affection that makes this all the more intense, and Apollo doesn't say anything as he pulls him back in and presses the head of his cock against his bottom lip, quirking an eyebrow. Percy drops his mouth open and gets a wink thrown his way for his trouble.

Then, Apollo grabs Percy's hand and guides it around his dick, licking his lips. "Well, baby? Gonna get that grade or not?"

Jesus fucking Christ, is Percy gonna get it. He tightens his grip and starts stroking him nice and slow, riding on the high of the color in Apollo's cheeks and the dark twinkle in his eye. He sucks his head into his mouth and moans at the precum pooling on his tongue, maintaining eye contact as well as he can.

"Fuck, you look amazing," Apollo mumbles, caressing his hair again. His smile sharpens, and he tilts his hips up. "Gonna swallow up my cum, baby?"

He doesn't get to express his opinion on that, because Apollo cums right inside his mouth and Percy chokes again, but he forces himself to stay still and take it, eyes rolling back.

Apollo releases him with a satisfied sigh, and immediately Percy crawls onto his lap, practically tearing his hoodie off and grabbing him by the hair and pressing their lips together. Apollo lets out a hum of satisfaction and licks into his mouth and all Percy wants is to drown in it.

"Fuck me," Percy whines, shivering at the hands running up and down his back and his sides until they settle on his hips, squeezing. Apollo just kisses him again and fuck, fuck this shit, he has to tell him. "I—gods, Daddy, I got a surprise for you."

Apollo pauses the trail of hickies he was working onto his neck, so evidently curious that Percy hears it in the air before he even says anything. "Oh? Really?"

Percy licks his lips, nervous. "It's inside my shorts."

Instantly, Apollo's hands are slipping under the hemline of his shorts and groping his ass; he lets out a rather intrigued sound at the lack of underwear, but actively gasps when he lets his fingers trail between his butt-cheeks.

"Fuck," he lets out, pressing his fingers against the plug. Percy tenses up and moans, rutting his hips into him. Apollo looks at him in awe. "You didn't."

"I did," Percy nods, voice strangled, rocking back on Apollo's fingers. He keeps staring at him and that really, really doesn't help his dick, still trapped inside his shorts. "Gods, Apollo, Daddy, *please*. I did this just for you. Can you fuck me? I've missed you."

He doesn't have to ask twice. Apollo actually tears his shorts off him and presses his fingers against Percy's mouth as he presses one last time against the plug before pulling it out. He chucks it somewhere, making it bounce off a wall, and then brings his wet fingers down, pressing two in, then moaning when Percy asks for another.

Apollo does the bare minimum of stretching him before he's lifting him up, hands on his thighs, not bothering to slip out of any of his clothes, in order to help him sink down on him. This is so fast and dirty and desperate but Percy doesn't care because he'd been sitting with that plug in his ass for over two hours and this, right here? It's Elysium.

Gods, Apollo did a number on him, because taking him inch by inch, sweat dripping down his back and his whimpers getting louder and louder, feeling the bruises already forming on his thighs from how hard he's gripping him, shouldn't feel like home. But it does.

Apollo bottoms out and groans. "Fuck, baby, you're so perfect. Better than I remembered."

Percy lets out a breathless laugh, rocking his hips and moaning. Apollo lets him continue, lets him set the pace, pressing his lips against his skin. "Did I—uh, *ah, fuck*—did... Did I get that grade?"

Apollo huffs out a laugh and moves his hips up for every single one of Percy's movements grinding down on him, making it even more intense. "You might have just passed the semester for everyone."

"You wouldn't do that," Percy rushes out, feeling all his breath escape him as Apollo fucks up particularly hard. His body starts heating up further, pressure mounting on him, clouding his mind. "Fuck, Daddy! Shit, shit, shit, I'm gonna cum, Apollo, Apollo—"

"It's okay, baby," Apollo speaks against his ear, and reaches down to wrap his hand around Percy's dick. He whimpers and sobs. "There we go, almost there, you can let go honey, you did so, so well for me, didn't you? You were so good, you're such a good boy—"

Percy's cum spills all over Apollo's fist and he lurches forwards, his body twitching as Apollo fucks him through it, burying his head against his neck. Percy wants Apollo to finish inside him and he doesn't even have to ask, because only a couple more thrusts and well-timed whimpers and Apollo is finishing, too.

They hold onto each other, panting, basking in all the warm fuzzy feelings of the afterglow. Then, Apollo holds out his hands and the wine with its glasses on the table appears in them; the bottle in one and the glasses in the other. Percy leans back and watches him fill them up. He grabs the one Apollo hands him with pleasure.

“Well,” Apollo starts, staring at Percy. He clinks their glasses together, and takes a sip, leaning back against the couch. He caresses his skin, fingertips dancing on his hip, as Percy drinks from his own glass. “How would you like a baby so you can truthfully call me daddy, hm?”

Percy chokes. “No!”

Apollo laughs, throwing his head back and then leaning in to kiss him, mumbling dumb apologies, sounding like a dream. Percy looks at him, from his blond hair and shifting eyes to the stupid, big heart he wears on his sleeve, and he sighs.

He didn’t know happiness could feel this bright.

Author's Note:

soooo. thoughts? owo

also btw ashilrak and i have a perpollo discord server!

<https://discord.gg/T7gZ39uwJG>

come join the cult :)